

PROMISES
OF

1968

CRISIS,
ILLUSION,
and UTOPIA

Edited by **Vladimir Tismaneanu**

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PROMISES OF 1968

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Crisis, Illusion, and Utopia

Edited by
VLADIMIR TISMANEANU



Central European University Press
Budapest–New York

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Published in 2011 by

Central European University Press
An imprint of the
Central European University Share Company
Nádor utca 11, H-1051 Budapest, Hungary
Tel: +36-1-327-3138 or 327-3000
Fax: +36-1-327-3183
E-mail: ceupress@ceu.hu
Website: www.ceupress.com

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ISBN 978-615-5053-04-7

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Promises of 1968 : crisis, illusion, and utopia / edited by Vladimir Tismaneanu.
p. cm.

ISBN 978-6155053047 (hardbound)—ISBN 978-6155053054 (pbk.)

1. Europe—Politics and government—1945-1989. 2. Social movements—Europe—History—20th century. 3. Nineteen sixty-eight, A.D. I. Tismaneanu, Vladimir. II. Title.

D1058.P794 2011
940.55'6—dc22

2010039411

Printed in Hungary by
Akadémiai Nyomda, Martonvásár

To the memory of Victor Zaslavsky
(1937–2009)

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VLADIMIR TISMANEANU

Introduction

The events of 1968 radically influenced the social, political, and cultural landscape of the post-1945 world. In the context of the Cold War, 1968 was a transnational moment of revolt against the status quo beyond the East-West divide.¹ It represented a turning point in world history that brought about a sweeping axiological reassessment of politics.² More than ten years ago, the editors of a collective volume about 1968 stated that “the memories of witnesses to the events of this *annus mirabilis* are still fragmentary and colored by partisanship, personal injury and defeat, or nostalgia for a heroic time, whereas historians have barely begun to treat ‘1968’ as a coherent historical phenomenon.”³ A decade later, the present contribution to the understanding of this historical “puzzle” provides some of the answers that might not have been available in the 1990s. It does not, however, claim to have found a resolution to the dilemmas raised by the topic discussed. Nevertheless, all the contributors agree that 1968 cannot be understood if it is removed from the context of both its aftermath and build-up. To paraphrase Charles Maier’s statement in his article, the premise of making sense of 1968 is the admission that it was simultaneously pregnant with its future and haunted by its past.⁴

¹ Gerd-Rainer Horn and Padraic Kenney, eds., *Transnational Moments of Change: Europe 1945, 1968, 1989* (Landham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004).

² On the 1968 as the redefinition of the ground of politics and the complication of the notion of the Left, see Geoff Eley’s chapter “1968: It Moves After All,” in *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850–2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 341–366.

³ Carole Fink, Philipp Gassert, and Detlef Junker, “Introduction,” in Carole Fink, Philipp Gassert, and Detlef Junker, eds., *1968: The World Transformed* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1.

⁴ Immanuel Wallerstein offered an insightful formulation to the intricacies embedded in 1968: “World-historic events have lives of their own and they re-

From France to Czechoslovakia, from Germany to Poland, from Spain to Italy, from the United States to the Soviet Union, the second half of the sixties was defined by the challenges of redefining oppositional politics, with varying degrees of participation and representation in the efforts to assert the awakening of society as a response to the perceived crisis of the state. The fundamental factor of differentiation among these movements was their attitude towards *utopia* with crucial consequences upon the re-conceptualization of the *political* in all these countries. If some were anti-ideological, others were against established structures of authority, but all were variants of an activism advocating the new societal differentiations developed in the aftermath of World War II. The circumstances of bipolarism imposed, nevertheless, a significant difference in rationale: if in the West, the logic of 1968 was of politically emancipating spaces previously exempt from public scrutiny, in the East, it was about humanizing Leninism, breaking its ideologically driven monopolistic grip on society.⁵ In the Soviet bloc, the crushing of the Prague Spring, the March events in Poland, and the turmoil in Yugoslavia brought about the “death of revisionism” (Michnik). In the West, the inability to articulate a coherent vision of an alternative order and the incapacity to sustain revolutionary action generated a departure from what Arthur Marwick coined as the “Great Marxisant Fallacy.”⁶ Tony Judt accurately noted that despite the era’s claims of novelty and radical change, the sixties were still very much dominated by one grand master-narrative “offering to make sense of everything while leaving open a place for human initiative: the political project of

sist any kind of simple capture. 1968 is no different.” Immanuel Wallerstein and Sharon Zukin, “1968, Revolution in the World-System: Theses and Queries,” *Theory and Society* 18, no. 4 (July 1989), 431–449.

⁵ Leszek Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism: Vol. III—The Breakdown* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978) and Vladimir Tismaneanu, *The Crisis of Marxist Ideology in Eastern Europe: The Poverty of Utopia* (London: Routledge, 1988).

⁶ Marwick defined this concept as “the belief that the society we inhabit is the bad bourgeois society, but that, fortunately, this society is in a state of crisis, so that the good society which lies just around the corner can be easily attained if only we work systematically to destroy the language, values, the culture, the ideology of bourgeois society.” Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c. 1958–c. 1974* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 10.

Marxism itself.”⁷ 1968 was a blessing in disguise because, through its failures, it revitalized liberalism. In the present volume, Agnes Heller perceptively summarizes the essential impact of these momentous events: they strengthened the center. For the first time in the twentieth century, the hegemony of radical thought among European intellectuals went through a phase of fundamental recoil. According to Heller, “through the weight of its new converts,” liberalism reasserted itself in a revival of democracy.

In the Soviet bloc, 1968 symbolized both the protest against the so-called “red bourgeoisie” (predated by the “Open Letter” addressed by Jacek Kuroń and Karol Modzelewski to the leaders of the Polish United Workers’ Party⁸) and the last attempt at reforming state socialism. After the crushing of the Prague Spring, few denizens of the East European countries retained illusions that communism could be reformed through benign experiments initiated by a liberal wing of the party elite. It became clear that the Soviet Union would not permit any new experimentation with the subversive idea of socialism with a human face. Dick Howard points to the crux of the matter in stating that “the lesson that I took from this [the crushing of the Czechoslovak project of ‘socialism with a human face’] was that communism simply could not be reformed.”

The Soviet leaders showed, through the “Brezhnev doctrine” and the condemnation of Marxist revisionism, their determination in maintaining a monopoly over the interpretation of Marxism-Leninism. In June 1969, at the last world communist conference, Leonid Brezhnev engaged in an overall attack on neo-Marxist revisionism, identifying it as a subversive, anti-socialist force in Europe, Latin America, and elsewhere. At the same time, the critical intellectuals in this area of Eu-

⁷ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 401.

⁸ Barbara Falk, *The Dilemmas of Dissidence in East-Central Europe: Citizen Intellectuals and Philosopher Kings* (Budapest and New York: CEU Press, 2003). In the aftermath of the Prague Spring, Miklós Haraszti wrote a similar critique in Hungary against the self-proclaimed worker’s state: *A Worker in a Worker’s State* (1972). Moreover, Kuroń and Modzelewski’s original letter was translated into French and distributed by the Trotskyite organization Jeunesse Communiste Revolutionnaire. This became one of the main reasons for Adam Michnik’s arrest. See Jerzy Eisler, “March 1968 in Poland,” in Fink, Gassert, and Junker, 1968, 237–251.

rope understood that real demands of society could not be limited to the restrictive program formulated by the communist party's "liberals." The year 1968, in the Soviet bloc, was the signal of the retreat from revisionism and the inception of the dissident movement, a large-scale, cross-regional "goodbye to Marx." And, with historical hindsight, one can also label it as the threshold for the gradual decomposition of the communist regimes. The system had lost its initial totalizing drive. Stagnation and immobility were its main characteristics. The increasingly routinized mechanization of ideology laid open the cracks in the system's edifice for easier exploitation by the opposition (e.g., "new evolutionism" or the Charter 77 movement). The Prague Spring (January–August), the Polish March student upheaval, the April student protests in Belgrade (and the later Croatian Spring of 1970–1971—an all-out contestation of this country on national bases), and the Soviet intellectuals' reaction to the Sinyavski–Daniel trial, all represented a fundamental shake-up of the Stalinist foundations of the Soviet bloc.⁹ Their failure meant the success of an enduring disenchantment with state socialism and with any hope of reforming these regimes. Moreover, as one of Gorbachev's future advisors remarked, another side effect of the Soviet Union's reassertion of hegemony was that the Western Communist parties "without confessing it, came to understand the irrelevance of the Communist movement either for the majority of the countries where it was formally present or, even more important, for the Soviet Union itself."¹⁰ The reaffirmation of the status quo and

⁹ V. Zubok's account about the generation of "Zhivago's children" shows how, by the end of the sixties, Russian intelligentsia began losing any hope of reforming Soviet-style communism. The Sinyavski–Daniel trial and the publication of Natalia Gorbanevskaya's *Chronicle of Current Events* (which Peter Reddaway called "the journal of an embryonic civil liberties union") signaled the shift to searching for an alternative discourse about democracy among Soviet intellectuals. Another side effect of 1968 was "the reinvention of Russia" (Y. Brudny). See Vladislav Zubok, *Zhivago's Children: The Last Russian Intelligentsia* (Boston: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), Yitzhak M. Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953–1991* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1998), and Peter Reddaway, ed., *Uncensored Russia: The Human Rights Movement in the Soviet Union*, with a foreword by Julius Telesin (London: J. Cape, 1972).

¹⁰ V. Cerniayev, quoted in Victor Zaslavsky's contribution to the volume.

systemic stagnation in the Soviet bloc signaled the irreversible “dis-enchantment with the (Communist) world.” Despite the fact that the Berlin Wall came tumbling down in 1989, “the soul of Communism had died twenty years before: in Prague, in August 1968.”¹¹

The West, on the other hand, experienced an upsurge of “romantic anti-capitalism,” a rebirth of radicalism fed by the re-enchantment with utopia. In the context of the shock produced by the Tet Offensive in Vietnam and the identity crisis of the former colonial powers, 1968 “began [for the New Left] with the scent of victory in the air” (Jeffrey Herf), for, as Paul Auster recalled, “the world seemed headed for an apocalyptic breakdown.”¹² The second half of the 1960s was both a return to Marx and a rejection of the then-existing practices of democracy (with the notable exception of Spain and Portugal, where, between 1966 and 1968, civil unrest was a rebuff targeting Salazar’s and Franco’s right-wing dictatorships). The influence of the New Left, the Chinese Cultural Revolution, the Vietnam War, the Latin American *guerilleros*, and of the de-colonization movements combined, in an amorphous blend, with the generational clash, an institutional crisis (the occupation of Sorbonne, the nearly two-year long paralysis of Italian universities) and a wave of recession (signaled, among other things, by the workers’ strikes and *autogestion* projects). This mix produced what some authors later called *les années 1968*. The ’68ers claimed to have developed a critique of the ideological bases of the West in the context of the Cold War (also against older self-representations of the Left) and a spontaneous, “direct action” against the “hidden oppression” of the liberal-capitalist establishment. The “anti-politics” of 1968 were, to a certain extent, a topsy-turvy expression of the search for reconciling theory with praxis (*Theorie/wut*). The extreme radicalization of certain sectors within the student movement and the cultivation of violence as a cathartic instrument led to the divorce between left-wing post-Marxist thinkers such as Adorno, Horkheimer, and Habermas, and those whom they suspected of “Red Fascist” inclinations. In France, Raymond Aron proposed a scathing critique of the new search for redemptive revolutionary paradigms.

¹¹ Judt, *Postwar*, 447.

¹² Paul Auster, “The Accidental Rebel,” *The New York Times*, April 23, 2008.

The present volume puts forth a discussion of 1968 as both a global event and a local moment of crisis. The main directions followed by the contributions are the crisis of “real existing socialism” and the failure of “socialism with a human face”; the critique of (neo-) Stalinism and the reactions of Leninist bureaucracies (role of critical intellectuals, crises with the Warsaw Pact, the Soviet invasion and its implications); the end of revisionism and the birth of the dissident (human rights) movements; Western utopia and the rediscovery of radicalism; the re-thinking of the *political* and the redefinition of modernity (e.g., the critique of liberal democracy in the West and of Leninism in the East). Overall, however, as most contributors to the present volume acknowledge, 1968 had two fundamental consequences. First, it revealed a systemic crisis within the countries that experienced these events; and second, it set up the ground for the discovery of the transformative role of civil society.¹³ The events, regardless of the East-West divide, reaffirmed the capacity of individual action. They caused a shift from revolution as collective action to designing a new project of universal human agency. The latter aimed at the founding of a political and of a culture resting on the heteronomy of their creators.

Promises of 1968’s structure attempts to follow simultaneously the topical profile and the scope of the articles included, as many of the contributors have been involved in and personally experienced the sixties. Part One of the volume bridges some of their memories with a reassessment of the main theoretical questions raised at the time. Part Two analyzes the most important legacies of 1968. Part Three brings forth more detailed and case-study-oriented analyses. The objective of

¹³ Claus Offe presented this issue from the point of view of a dichotomy between the political paradigms of the “old politics,” as they had been formulated in the post-World War II era, and of “the new politics,” which was founded on the social movements that gained prominence as a result of the sixties. The fundamental difference was that in order “to emancipate themselves from the state, the new movements claim, civil society itself—its institutions and its very standards of rationality and progress—must employ practices that belong to an intermediate sphere between private pursuits and concerns and institutional, state-sanctioned modes of politics.” See Claus Offe, “Challenging the Boundaries of Institutional Politics: Social Movements Since the 1960s,” in Charles S. Maier, ed., *Changing Boundaries of the Political: Essays on the Evolving Balance between the State and Society, Public and Private in Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 65.

this distribution of contributions is to map out the essential characteristics of the “spirit of the sixties,” the volume’s underlying theme. On the one hand, authors such as Karol Sołtan, Jan-Werner Müller, Aurelian Crăiuțu, Charles Maier, or Tereza-Brîndușa Palade pinpoint some of the defining features of this rather slippery concept. Others, such as Martin Palouš, Agnes Heller, Irena Grudzinska Gross, Dick Howard, Jiří Pehe, or Jeffrey Isaac, appeal to a technique of analytical anamnesis in order to gain perspective on their personal perceptions and experiences of the events. In deconstructive fashion, all these authors are engaged in what Charles Maier dubbed “trend spotting.” There are at least two levels of discussion that can be identified: the analysis of the significance of the sixties from the point of view of their immediate impact on the affected societies, and the assessment of their relevance on the basis of the aftermath. The starting point, however, is that 1968 was a historical moment of “successful social-cultural criticism” (J.W. Müller). The papers included in the volume emphasize at least three trajectories of challenge against the past: generational, cultural-ideological, and strategic-historical.

Irena Grudzinska Gross formulates the main problem of the first trajectory of contestation: “the secrets of our parents’ past weighed heavily on the lives of the entire generation. Their past blocked our future.” Indeed, the ’68ers were the first to have been born after 1945; they were the baby boomers of the 1950s. They had no experience and even scant knowledge of the deprivations and horrors of the 1930s and 1940s. The limits of their parents’ lives did not apply to them. From this point of view, the students’ movements on either side of the East-West divide were extremely similar: “The younger generation felt weighed down by the conservatism of the older generation and their overt disapproval of new forms of cultural expression, whether it be reflected in music, fashion, literary or cinematic style, and even sexual promiscuity.”¹⁴ The youth of the 1960s wished to fulfill their own agenda of expressiveness and self-realization, oblivious of the anxieties of their families’ past.¹⁵ The result was a sudden resurfacing of the

¹⁴ Barbara Falk, *The Dilemmas of Dissidence*, 68.

¹⁵ Andrzej Paczkowski, in his *The Spring Will Be Ours: Poland and the Poles from Occupation to Freedom* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), makes a similar statement for Poland: “For many young people ‘the March events’ became a formative political experience that shaped

revolution genie. What was fundamentally new was the fact that the rebels attempted to develop their own revolutionary language. From this point of view, as clearly showed for several cases, from France to Yugoslavia, from the United States to Italy (see J.W. Müller, Dick Howard, Aurelian Crăiuțu, or Nick Miller), they failed, for they were still working, as mentioned above, with the old tools of Marxisant critiques. But such temporary reversion only fueled a reinvention of the political, centered on the idea of inviolable human rights. With the benefit of hindsight, 1968 can no longer be read disconnected from the upheavals of 1989, for these dates form “a continuity across the blocs in the struggle to enlarge the domain of human dignity.”¹⁶

Here the second challenge of the '68ers, the cultural-ideological one, takes the stage. Our starting point is premised on two fundamental insights: that of Tony Judt, who labeled the period as “the great age of Theory”; and that of Marwick, who convincingly showed how, by means of gradually incorporating subcultures into the mainstream, “the long sixties” represented a transnational, global cultural revolution. Following Judt, the sixties stand out because of the pervasive obsession within the academia with “interrogation.” In *Promises of 1968*, the point made by Judt for the discipline of history is taken up by Jeffrey Isaac with reference to the social sciences, particularly to political science. According to him, one of the crucial meanings of the sixties was “the promise of critical intellectual inquiry in a thoroughly disenchanted, and post-post-historical, world.” In the same vein, Jan-Werner Müller makes a case for the importance of the “practical problematization” of those times. Despite all the theory, which he discusses in detail (using Marcuse, Agnoli, or the Situationists as examples), stressing its rather short historical lifespan, failure of ideology brought about “a loss of belief in the capacity of societies for collective self-transformation through mass political action focused on political institution.”

Nevertheless, 1968 not only meant the end of a cycle in revolutionary practice and theory, but also represented a vital shake-up of postwar societies. This issue is addressed in the volume, for the French

a whole generation, one that was to play a major role in organizing various forms of social protest in the future” (328).

¹⁶ Konrad H. Jarausch, “1968 and 1989: Caesuras, Comparisons, and Connections,” in Fink, Gassert, and Junker, eds., 1968, 477.

case, by Aurelian Craiutu's analysis of Raymond Aron's critique of May 1968. On the one hand, Aron was shocked by the '68ers' disregard of the principles of legality, thus giving way to institutional dissolution. On the other, Aron admitted that the rebellion of the youth was a signal of the perpetuation of forms of state and institutional authority indicative of the French society's generalized malaise. However, the story that Craiutu tells is a cautionary one: Aron was one of the very few who kept a level head during 1968. The specter of violence did haunt this *annus mirabilis*. Through his analysis of the Red Army Faction, Jeffrey Herf convincingly shows how "the years of terror and murder cannot be hermetically sealed off from either the theory or the practice of the New Left in 1968." Herf, along with other authors in the present volume, also stresses some of the resemblances between the radical thought of the sixties and the anti-parliamentarism and anti-liberalism of the 1920s. Indeed the move toward violence was the strongest sign of the failure of the illusions of 1968.

But perhaps the most sobering story of the period is the Yugoslav one described by Nick Miller. The inability of systemic re-invention in this communist federation and unwillingness of both the *nomenklatura* and the intellectuals to reformulate the initial critique into reform led to a revival of alternate modes of contestation: a new dynamic of ethnic reaffirmation. In the aftermath of the revolts in Priština, Belgrade, and later, Zagreb, the opposition began advocating what Miller calls "un-beautiful ideas." It organized in similar fashion as the civic initiatives in Poland, Czechoslovakia, or Hungary, but its focus was on atavistic visions of the nation. The phenomenon of the unfulfilled potential of the sixties is also emphasized by the papers dealing with the case of Romania. Three articles discuss the various aspects of this issue. Cătălin Avramescu, in a detailed analysis of the meeting between the Romanian communist leader, Nicolae Ceaușescu, and Charles de Gaulle, stresses the conceit of what, at the time, was perceived as the country's increasing openness to the West. Rejecting the temptation of conflating *realpolitik* with reform, Avramescu concludes that this event, despite its presupposed significance, only reinforced a regime bent on continuing with its radical transformist agenda. The meeting between the two heads of state only consolidated a practice of extracting domestic support for the Romanian Communist Party's rule at the expense of true openness to the society's participation in its politics. Cristian Vasile

provides an additional explanation of the illusion of the sixties in this country: the inability of Romanian left-wing intellectuals to articulate a critique of the system from within. In this case, the de-legitimization of Marxism did not generate a local version of the paradigm of civic humanism. It instead produced, similarly to the Yugoslav case, a reversion to nationalist re-enchantments.

Along the same lines, Vladimir Tismaneanu and Bogdan Iacob deconstruct the promises of 1968 in Romania. The two authors analyze the RCP's political discourse and practices before and immediately after August 21, 1968. They reach the conclusion that despite the employment of similar terminology as the reformers in Prague, the Romanian leadership professed the conceptual bedrock of Stalinism. The chimera of the sixties in this country came from an enrichment of the regime's identity-driven master-narrative with nationalistic tonalities. Liberalization was confused with a turn to systemic self-centeredness. With only a weak left-wing tradition present, the reaffirmation of national authenticity within a Marxist-Leninist framework found fertile ground both among the country's intellectuals and the population at large. The underlying conclusion of these three papers is that 1968 in Romania was only a reinvention of local communism as a totalitarian movement. What Mieczysław Moczar failed to achieve in Poland, Ceaușescu achieved in Romania.¹⁷

But to return to the ideological-cultural challenge of the sixties, one needs to add, as Tereza-Brîndușa Palade does, that these years' lasting legacies are premised on the principle of de-radicalization. The exact coinage that she uses is that of "moving away from a Marxist *forma mentis*." She first undergoes a philosophical dissection of Marxism, which she finds to be defined by idealism, prophetic historism turned into a teleological sociology of knowledge, and by the imperative of progress as a substitute for the transcendental agent. Then, with the aid of Aron

¹⁷ For a recent collective effort on the differences, similarities, and legacies of "how the diverse peoples of the region reacted to the establishment of the Soviet-type systems in their lands; how indigenous communist parties interacted with, or challenged, their Soviet overlords; and how local authorities and Moscow dealt with the looming presence of nonconformity, dissent, and resistance among relatively broad strata of the population" (p. 1), see Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe, eds., *Revolution and Resistance in Eastern Europe: Challenges to Communist Rule* (Oxford: Berg, 2006).

and Kołakowski, she proceeds in building an alternative framework for what she labels as the re-radicalized post-Marxist mentality: an intermediate position shaped by the refusal to isolate partial truths into absolute ones. Her conclusion is that the ascent into post-ideology came when the inquisitive quest for truth became the priority of those who earlier found reality to be an element of the greatest annoyance. Despite a harsher evaluation of the post-1968 developments, Palade's statements echo Sołtan's exegesis on the new ideal type as developed after 1968: the project of universal human agency that avoids the destructiveness implied by the earlier model of all-out revolution. Sołtan identifies among the consequences of the 1968 developments a move toward an acquiescence of the fact that "the elimination of *some* imposed limits and constraints is just *one aspect* of what is involved in creative agency. Limits are also limits and foundations of creation. And creation is in part discovery (of the requirements of this burden, and its potential)."

Such reformulation meant, as hinted by both Dick Howard and Jeffrey Isaac, a rethinking of the nature and role of revolution under circumstances of social and political transformation. The latter was the Holy Grail of the sixties, but it turned into a gradually crystallizing program of change from within. In the East it took the form of a culture of human rights. As described in this volume by Martin Palouš and Jiří Pehe, those who were left to pick themselves up from the debris of the Prague Spring decided that "a society cannot function without a moral foundation" (M.P.). Pehe correctly remarks that after the Soviet invasion, what survived was the idea of building a robust civil society, a counterpart to the attempts of various communist parties in the region to "normalize" their subjects. Another direction that the post-1968 transformation followed in the Soviet bloc was what Agnes Heller called "the alternative imagination." She stresses the fact that the impact of the Western 1968 on the East materialized particularly on the level of cultural representations different from those of regime-endorsed mainstream. In Hungary, and across all of Central Europe, the cultural challenge against the system meant carving out as much space as possible for other ways of expressing oneself. Through music, theater, film, literature, or theory, those who contested the party-state aimed "to keep themselves apart, to exercise their moral right to one's own conviction, tastes, and ideas." It also helped that, in the aftermath of 1968, this part of Europe itself was being rediscovered and indeed re-imagined.

In an attempt to provide a “Europeanizing” account of the years that followed, Bradley Abrams shows how the articulation of a common and expanding understanding of human rights beyond the East-West divide was greatly helped by the growing significance of the question “What was Europe?” To paraphrase Hugh Seton-Watson, Central Europe (at least) was no longer a region culturally remote from the rest of the continent, for it was now heard of all too much.¹⁸ The reassessment of the symbolic geography of Europe after the sixties allowed for a return of history that made the revival of civil society in the East an issue all too palpable in the West. By the end of the 1970s, the problems of the Soviet bloc could no longer be shelved by Western publics based on the simple antinomy of communism vs. capitalism.

The third trajectory of challenge was strategic-historical. As many of the authors in the volume remark, 1968 was fundamentally a rejection of the Yalta system—the origin of the (perceived) imperialism that all rebels at the time fought against. In a revised version of an article published in 1998,¹⁹ Mark Kramer extensively describes the total unwillingness of the Kremlin leadership and of other Eastern communist leaders (Ulbricht, Zhivkov, Gomulka) to accept the possibility of an alternative path to socialism. Kramer shows how Brezhnev and his coterie took great pains in demonstrating, if not the counter-revolutionary nature of the Prague Spring, then at least its potential.²⁰ They feared not only the possible spillover effect of the reforms in Czechoslovakia, but also the officialization of polycentrism within the Soviet area of influence. In the context of a deepening rift with China, of the “Albania desertion,” and the Romanian appetite for autonomy, Brezhnev ultimately rejected the possibility of pluralism from within.²¹ The doctrine

¹⁸ Hugh Seton-Watson, “Conflict in Bohemia,” in Ferdinand Mount, ed., *Communism: A TLS Companion* (London: Harvill, 1992), 159–164.

¹⁹ See Mark Kramer, “The Czechoslovak Crisis and the Brezhnev Doctrine,” in Fink, Gassert, and Junker, eds., 1968, 110–171.

²⁰ Tismaneanu and Iacob also analyze an internal document by one of the RCP’s influential ideologues, Valter Roman (one of Imre Nagy’s interrogators during his stay in Snagov, Romania), who went to great lengths in differentiating between what he considered the counter-revolutionary nature of the 1956 Hungarian revolution and the correctness of “the Czechoslovak path to socialism” in 1968.

²¹ One should not forget Palmiro Togliatti’s influential “Yalta memorandum” (1964), which argued for “doctrinal pluralism and political diversification

developed in the aftermath of the Soviet intervention was aimed at preventing “the loss of socialist gains”—in other words, the preservation of the status quo. And indeed, for twenty-one years, the Moscow Center (Kenneth Jowitt) successfully drove the message home in the sense that, from U.S. officials to West German leaders, any “future ‘bridges’ to Eastern Europe would have to go first through the Kremlin.”²² But, as mentioned earlier, the Soviet initial success in Czechoslovakia and the implicit reconfirmation of hegemony also meant an irreversible loss of legitimacy and credibility of the idea of a “family of socialist nations.” Kramer, Tismaneanu and Iacob, and Zaslavsky show how the communist commonwealth was weakened along three axes: the increasing futility of the Warsaw Pact (the Romanian and Albanian challenge; widespread demoralization in Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary); the deepening Sino-Soviet split (with the drifting of the Chinese toward an agreement with the United States); and, last but not least, the turn of some Western Communist parties toward gradualism and a reaffirmation of democratic socialism (Spain, Austria, Italy, and, more reluctantly, France).²³ As Maud Bracke has convincingly

within the world communist movement.” In other words, the centrifugal tendencies were already in place, but the hegemon (the USSR) refused to imagine an alignment different from that of the Yalta system. See Maud Bracke, *Which Socialism, Whose Détente? West European Communism and the Czechoslovak Crisis, 1968* (Budapest and New York: CEU Press, 2007), 106.

²² An interesting addition to this point is that one of the by-products of the 1968 events, and a subtle but consistent challenge to the Yalta system, was West Germany’s *Ostpolitik*. According to Gottfried Niedhart, *Ostpolitik* was both a form of closure for the Germans, Poles, and the Soviets on the problem of the postwar borders and a framework of developing novel relations among the countries in the region that, in the long term, would amount to the total denial of bipolar, superpower politics. See Gottfried Niedhart, “*Ostpolitik*: The Role of the Federal Republic of Germany in the Process of Détente,” in Fink, Gassert, and Junker, eds., 1968, 173–192.

²³ For a recent contribution on the history of communism in Europe focused on the two centers (Russia and Germany) that implemented Marxism in “real” historical contexts, see Ronald Kowalski, *European Communism 1848–1991* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). Kowalski, echoing the earlier classic studies of Wolfgang Leonhard, *Die Dreispaltung des Marxismus: Ursprung und Entwicklung des Sowjetmarxismus, Maoismus und Reformkommunismus* (Düsseldorf: Econ-Verlag, 1970) and of Alvin W. Gouldner, *The Two Marxisms: Contradictions and Anomalies in the Development of Theory* (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), argues that the fundamental ambivalences of

showed, after 1968, any hopes for the organization of a permanent structure of world communism were dashed. The ground was then set for further redefinitions of the postwar order.²⁴

One additional issue that some of the authors in *Promises of 1968* bring up is that of the present readings of 1968. In the Czech Republic and Poland, the image of 1968 is part and parcel of the narrative about these countries' communist pasts. J. Pehe states that the Prague Spring became a collateral victim of some Czechs' black-and-white approach to the communist past. The trauma of the Soviet intervention is still being felt in the attempts of those who push for a totalitarian continuum, oblivious of the reforms pursued by Dubček and his team. Moreover, anti-communism became a stake in the contemporary political struggle, pushing some to turn a blind eye to the meaning and true legacies of 1968 in Czechoslovakia (e.g., Charter 77 as the first step to democratization). Michal Kopeček explained the cause of this phenomenon: the incomplete or faulty critical historicization of the Prague Spring. The ideologization of the past comes from an inability to admit "an essential diversity of historical experiences under the surface of seemingly unified national histories."²⁵ A similar development is noticed, for the Romanian case, by Tismaneanu and Iacob. The direction, though, is reversed: instead of an all-out rejection of 1968,

Marxism constitute the premise for the historicization of communisms in Europe.

²⁴ Western Communist parties were in a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, in Italy, Austria, Spain, and France it became obvious that Soviet-style communism was not conducive to a democratic transition to socialism. On the other hand, very few (if any) of the leaders of these parties were willing to adopt strong and lasting anti-Soviet stances both within the world communist movement and more generally at an international level. V. Zaslavsky argues that a combination of domestic support among the rank and file for the USSR and unwillingness from the PCI's Politburo to admit that the epicenter of crisis was in Moscow amounted to a rather subdued attitude of this party toward Soviet hegemony.

²⁵ Michal Kopeček, "In Search of 'National Memory': The Politics of History, Nostalgia and the Historiography of Communism in the Czech Republic and East Central Europe," in Michal Kopeček, ed., *Past in the Making: Historical Revisionism in Central Europe after 1989* (Budapest and New York: CEU Press, 2008), 82. For a similar approach for the case of Romania, see Lucian Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness* (Budapest and New York: CEU Press, 1997).

some historians use Ceaușescu's condemnation of the Soviet invasion as a foundation for a revitalization of the national-communist narrative about ethnic pride and exceptionalism.

Another difficulty in contemporary readings of 1968 in the East is related to the problem of anti-Semitism. The classic case here is, of course, Poland. Irena Grudzinska Gross tackles this thorny issue, advocating a reassessment of 1968 from the point of view of the so-called "Jewish question." If for the participants in the students' demonstrations their Jewishness was not a determining factor, the regime (and some sections of the public opinion) forced it into the center of events. Gross advocates the insertion of such a vantage point into the more general analysis of the communist experience in Poland. She warns, however, that the problem of anti-Semitism must not become a pretext for deepening already existing parallel histories (Polish vs. Jewish). It could open the door to a more integrated analysis of the multifariousness of the period in question. One example of such an endeavor is a recent issue of *Polin* that goes to great lengths to discuss the "Jewish question" in Poland as part of the larger evolutionary trends of the communist regime in this country.²⁶ For the case of Romania, Tismaneanu and Iacob, as well as Vasile, point to an informal, state-encouraged anti-Semitism that had its origins in the purges of the 1950s. By the end of the 1960s, it took the form of a gradual but thorough demotion from all positions of power of communists considered of Jewish origin.²⁷ The nationalist rhetoric of August 1968 set the stage for the openly anti-Semitic jibes of Romanian protochronists in the late 1970s and 1980s.

Not only in the East was the "Jewish question" a hot topic. The sixties were indeed the years when the Holocaust started to become

²⁶ Leszek W. Gluchowski and Antony Polonsky, eds., *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry; 1968 Forty Years After*, vol. 21 (Oxford and Portland: The Litman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2009). In Poland, the imperatives of political unity and of calming social unrest under circumstances of a succession crisis reasserted, through officially sponsored anti-Semitism, two fundamental features of national Stalinism: communist xenophobia and anti-cosmopolitanism.

²⁷ For a similar argument, see Leon Volovici, "Romanian Jewry under Rabbi Moses Rosen during the Ceaușescu Regime," in Ezra Mendelsohn, ed., *Jews and the State: Dangerous Alliances and the Perils of Privilege* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 181–192.

a central issue of European debates about the past. These were the times of the Frankfurt Auschwitz and Eichmann trials, the times when German youth asked their fathers what they had done under Hitler. Research about the extermination of European Jews took off, and gradually the Holocaust entered the collective conscience, memory, and identity of Europe. One novel development, however, is the one identified by Jeffrey Herf: the anti-Semitism of the radical New Left. The West German terrorists employed “a defensive anti-Semitism” (Th.W. Adorno), one which reverses the actual relation of perpetrator and victim, allowing for the denial of well-known facts and expressing anger at the damage done to the collective narcissism rather than displaying a sense of guilt. The Red Army Faction denied the uniqueness of the Holocaust, comparing it to colonial conflicts and with the effects of “American imperialism.” More generally speaking, in many instances, the extreme wings of the New Left linked two European traditions, communism and anti-Semitism, and the results, during the 1970s, were disastrous, sometimes even murderous.

Nevertheless, the overall diagnosis of the sixties in the present volume is a positive one. It is so not because of some path-breaking results indicating a successful 1968. The conclusions are favorable but more along the lines of Paul Berman’s argument in *A Tale of Two Utopias*. The ’68ers wanted to change life, to emancipate themselves, to bring down the restraining structures of the Cold War. They wanted to fuse Karl Marx’s call for changing the world with Arthur Rimbaud’s behest (*changez la vie*). Despite their original intentions and discourses, the effects of their actions were of a different sort. Most of the social movements they led were non- or even illiberal. On both sides of the Iron Curtain, visions of democracy were utopian, if not altogether misguided. And yet, the long-term effect was the coming of democracy in Europe (accompanied, of course, by expected birth pangs and bloody conception). From 1968 until 1989, the ’68ers matured into a liberal and realistic Left. Their subcultures gathered into a spiritual revolution. By the end of the 1970s, in the West, the old politics and order of the Yalta system was displaced. In the East the same process reached completion only by the end of the 1980s. Charles Maier eminently summarizes the transformation: “1968 closed an epoch as surely as it opened one.” To paraphrase Paul Berman, the imaginary panoramas deployed across the world by the Western rebellious youth gradually

gave way to the new realities of reformed democratic societies.²⁸ In the East, decade-long futile attempts to find ways of reforming communism from within were replaced by an emphasis on human dignity and on the inviolability of human rights.²⁹ The end of the sixties brought in the East, despite widespread normalization, the advent of living in truth, independent of the trappings of what Brîndușa Palade called the Marxist *forma mentis*. As communist regimes declined under the burden of their own ineffectiveness, as the elites lost their sense of historical predestination, it became possible for the long-silent civil society to reorganize itself and to launch a battle for the reconstitution of the public sphere. The main battlefield in the 1970s and 1980s was the restoration of hope for social change—people became convinced that the rules of the game were not eternal, that it was worth fighting for human dignity, and that success in fighting such a fight had a real chance. Ultimately, 1968 effected, both in the West and the East, an anti-ideological reaction that was the premise of what Karol Sołtan coined “the project of a global civil society.” To close with Tony Judt’s words, “a 180-year cycle of ideological politics in Europe was drawing to a close.”³⁰ Nineteen sixty-eight was indeed one of the world-histor-

²⁸ See Paul Berman’s introduction in *A Tale of Two Utopias: The Political Journey of the Generation of 1968* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996).

²⁹ See Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Reinventing Politics: Eastern Europe from Stalin to Havel* (New York: Free Press, 1992; paperback with new afterword, 1993).

³⁰ Judt, *ibid.*, 449. Wallerstein offers a different reading of 1968. Rather than seeing it as the beginning of the end of revolutionary/radical mass politics, Wallerstein understands it as the starting point of the globalization and generalization of anti-systemic movements: the “rainbow coalition” applied to “trans-zonal cooperation”—the only way in which a “desirable transformation of the capitalist world-economy is possible.” However, his conviction that these movements were situated *outside* rather *within* (as in Judt’s and other authors’ analysis) is the real source of his frustrations: “a fully coherent alternative strategy” did not appear. Wallerstein is correct in stating that “the real importance of the Revolution of 1968 is less its critique of the past than the questions it raised about the future.” But, as the upheavals of 1989 (the year of publication of his article) demonstrated, the effects of the sixties impacted the recreation of the center, rather than the re-enforcement and re-invention of the extremes. See Wallerstein and Zukin, *ibid.*, 442–448. To paraphrase Marwick, the social movement developed in the aftermath of the sixties did not confront their societies but permeated and transformed them.

ical events of our age, *la brèche*, the cleavage which set up a course of events that seem to have yet run their course.³¹

A few acknowledgements need to be made. The present volume includes the proceedings of the conference “Promises of 1968: Crisis, Illusion and Utopia” (November 6–7, 2008, in Washington, D.C.). It was part of a multi-year project (started in 2007) coordinated by the Center for the Study of Post-Communist Societies at the University of Maryland (College Park) in collaboration with the Romanian Cultural Institute. The project aims to provide, by means of reflecting on watershed moments of post-1945 history, an overview of the global dynamics characteristic for the twentieth century and its lessons and impact upon the twenty-first. The conveners of the conference were H.R. Patapievici, president of the Romanian Cultural Institute (RCI); Vladimir Tismaneanu, University of Maryland; and Christian Ostermann, Cold War International History Program at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. The editor would like to express his gratitude to H.R. Patapievici and to Mircea Mihăieș, the RCI’s vice president, who have enthusiastically embraced the idea of a series of conferences on seminal political-intellectual issues, in Washington, D.C., with the purpose of strengthening and developing the already existing connections between the Romanian scholarly community and American academia. I am grateful to Paul Berman, who presented a reconsideration of some of the insights he developed in the now classic *A Tale of Two Utopias*. Charles Gati, Charles King, John Lampe, and Jiří Pehe were superb discussants for the conference panels, offering excellent insights and enriching suggestions. Special thanks go to Bogdan Cristian Iacob, a graduate student at the History Department of the Central European University and project coordinator on behalf of the Romanian Cultural Institute. He decisively contributed to the successful organization of the conference and the subsequent editorial efforts in putting together this volume.

Washington, D.C.
April 2010

³¹ Edgar Morin, Claude Lefort, and Cornelius Castoriadis, *La Brèche: Premières réflexions sur les événements* (Paris: Fayard, 1968).

MARTIN PALOUŠ

*Revolutions and Revolutionaries,
Lessons of the Years of Crises*

Three Czech Encounters with Freedom

Forty years have already passed since 1968 and there is no doubt that what happened during this year of promises and hopes turned into illusions and utopias, leaving behind a significant trace—both locally and globally—in our recent history. That the legacies of 1968 are worth being explored and discussed today, not only from the historical point of view, but also in the light of our current political experience. The present volume's declared aim is to put forth a discussion of 1968 as both a global event and a local moment of crisis.

The global versus local connections become, indeed, especially manifest in the moments of crises. The conference's declared aim is “to put forth a discussion of 1968 as both a global event and a local moment of crisis.” The global versus local connections become, indeed, especially manifest in the moments of crises. Seen from my own locus—from the Czech point of view—any meaningful discussion of 1968 must address, in one way or another, the following questions: What actually was the place and significance of the Prague Spring and all other events that occurred during the subsequent seasons of this year, in the broader context of modern Czech political experience? What are the lessons we should have learned from them? What is the legacy of 1968—freedom rediscovered and lost again—as far as all future Czech encounters with freedom in the second half of the twentieth century are concerned?

In 2007 we commemorated the thirtieth anniversary of the foundation of Charter 77, a Czechoslovak human-rights movement initiated by a small group of people who decided to make a stand against the post-1968 “normalization” process. In 2009, we celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the revolutionary events of 1989 that brought

our Babylonian captivity to its end; that reversed, abruptly and unexpectedly, what looked in 1968 as our inescapable fate—to remain forever a satellite vegetating on the periphery of the Soviet “evil empire.” Is it possible at all to understand the significance and meaning of 1968 without also taking into account the other two recent Czech anniversaries?

It needs to be said that all three years just mentioned—1968, 1977, and 1989—were also turning points in my own biography. Is it something that makes me unfit to perceive and analyze them now as their unbiased observer? I frankly do not know. Being aware of this dilemma, I have decided not to aspire to an observer’s detachment and instead to hold onto my experience. Instead of attempting an impartial analysis of these three Czech encounters with freedom in the second half of the twentieth century, I will offer three short sketches of 1968, 1977, and 1989, based primarily on my personal memories, three “anamnetic experiments” (to borrow the term from Eric Voegelin), in the hope that they may be capable of revealing something of general relevance.

1968

In 1968 I was a teenager just entering the world of grown-ups. I certainly was not shocked nor too surprised when the “process of renewal,” announced by the “progressive” reformist leadership of the Communist Party, which replaced its “conservative” wing, got into full swing in early 1968. On the contrary, I perceived the sudden burst of freedom into our closed society as a logical, one would say almost natural, outcome of the “thaw” which had been taking place during the 1960s, when I myself, born in 1950, was progressing through my teens. Growing up in the environment of an intellectual, non-communist family, I became during this decade (later symptomatically nicknamed “golden”) an avid consumer of everything—books, essays, and articles published in “progressive” journals and periodicals, films, theater plays, music—that was bringing a fresh breeze to our socialist everydayness. I hoped to learn more about the world beyond our borders, which was getting more accessible thanks to the gradual removal of ideological barriers. I desired to travel to the West and to establish

new lines of communication. I had the same basic feelings as all other youngsters anywhere else in the world, believing, because of their age, that the future is a kind of reservoir of opportunities; that what one should expect realistically as an essential part of the human condition is the arrival of the unexpected; that tomorrow may always be different from today, because the very essence of human life is the human capacity for new beginnings.

As Czechoslovak society was awakening in the 1960s from the Stalinist nightmare, I was following this trend in my own way, discovering the world out there, seeking guidance and inspiration from the ever-growing group of thinkers and public intellectuals, both Marxists and non-Marxists, who were influencing Czechoslovak public discourse at this time. I never believed in socialism of any kind; it was not a matter of creed for me, but just a reality experienced. I did not feel at all to have been “brainwashed” or indoctrinated by the communist education and certainly did not need to sober up from the previous temporary intoxication by Marxist-Leninist ideology. My political convictions were, indeed, products of the “mind of the new one” in Plato’s sense;¹ fuzzy, regrettably uninformed, and certainly not clearly articulated. In this receptive, open, but rather messy and eclectic state of mind, I did not hesitate for a second to agree that the project to “endow socialism with a human face”—if it meant to free our society from worn-out and debilitating ideology, to introduce at least some rational economic reforms, to start respecting freedom of speech and other fundamental human rights, to allow civic associations to arise freely with their initiatives, to let people travel abroad—was a very good idea, indeed.

The Soviet-led invasion of August 21 was a shock for me as it was for the whole nation, although many political realists were apparently not surprised at all by this act of imperialist aggression. After it happened, I was as amazed as anybody else by the spontaneous collective reaction of Czechs and Slovaks to this situation. The national response to the invasion of the Warsaw Pact armies was, indeed, unforgettable. The days which followed after the military occupation of Czechoslovakia turned, contrary to the designs of those who planned this act of

¹ Plato’s *Theatetus*, “the mind of the young man” (or more exactly, the mind of the new one, *tou neou hé dianoiá*).

“fraternal international assistance,” into a genuine, although short-lived, revolution.

People started immediately, without any official appeal or order, to struggle both collectively and individually against the official Soviet propaganda. They launched their own public campaigns, not only protesting loudly against the unlawful occupation, but also debating with the occupiers, jumping on their tanks, trying to explain to them that there was no “counter-revolution,” no civil war, no enemies of socialism in Czechoslovakia, but just peaceful freedom-loving people who wanted to live their lives in their own way. It was absolutely fascinating to observe the whole nation standing united behind its communist, but at this moment genuinely popular government, ready to act in defense of its rights, committed to its values and principles, well-organized, disciplined, unresigned, and unfrightened.

This revolution quickly invented its own “language,” with its specific message and semantics, its specific means of free, unhindered communication. Looking at it retrospectively forty years later, I would say it was the language of our “golden” sixties at its best: starting with improvised posters and leaflets displayed in practically each shop window on the streets, through the regular newspapers and journals made in the clandestine printing works and regularly distributed by the network of volunteers, and ending in a couple of days with the functioning system of independent radio and TV broadcasting. The leading members of the progressive wing of the Communist Party who managed to escape arrest by the Soviet occupation forces joined the spontaneous revolutionary stream without hesitation. They even succeeded in organizing the extraordinary clandestine Party Congress, in a Prague factory under the protection of local workers, that condemned the aggression against Czechoslovakia and set out the program of continuation of reforms of the Prague Spring. The conservative members of the Politburo, the agents of the Secret Service who participated from the very beginning in the pro-Soviet conspiracy, and all the old-fashioned, Stalinist “comrades” throughout the country, who were ready to cooperate with the occupiers, were desperately isolated and stigmatized as traitors.

Hannah Arendt, in an unsurpassed analysis of the phenomenon of modern revolutions, points to the three fundamental principles animating them and inspiring their participants. She calls them, “fol-

lowing eighteenth-century political language”: public freedom, public happiness, and public spirit.² If I am to characterize the course of events in Czechoslovakia after August 21, 1968, in a nutshell, it was, indeed, as if some miraculous trigger was pulled and all three Arendtian principles, otherwise dreaming somewhere in the depth of our collective soul, suddenly woke up and were set, by the very power of the revolutionary spirit, into a spontaneous, smart, and concerted action.

The higher the revolutionary emotions that burst out in the days after the Soviet-led invasion, the deeper the fall which followed. In fact, the retrogression from freedom back to the slavery of totalitarianism started at the very moment when the arrested leaders of the Prague Spring were finally released and returned from Moscow, after they had signed a protocol there that not only decided their own political future but sealed our national fate for the next twenty-one years. Actually, the role of the “Men of January”—who were then for a short time on the pedestal of national heroes—in the suppression of the spirit that brought the whole nation together in a spontaneous revolutionary action was the saddest and the most tragic part of the story of our 1968. Their repeated promises to remain faithful to the principles and ideals of the Prague Spring, their repeated appeals to the nation to understand the current difficulties, and to accept all the concessions that had to be made, supposedly in order to preserve the main objectives of the “process of renewal,” turned out to be nothing but empty words and later, even sheer lies of experienced party apparatchiks. A treaty was signed and duly ratified in Parliament under their watch to legitimize the “temporary” stay of the Soviet troops on our territory. Contrary to all their proclamations and assurances, the Soviet justification of the August intervention—that the socialist order in Czechoslovakia had to be “rescued” by the “fraternal international assistance”—won recognition in the Czechoslovak Communist Party as its new official political line. It was shocking and sad, indeed, to observe the “Men of January” voluntarily playing an active role—until they themselves were forced to step down—in making this U-turn. The results of their “defense” of the legacies of post-January developments in the period that followed August 21 were simply indefensible. The measures first

² Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: The Viking Press, 1963), 223.

to limit and later to entirely eliminate the influence of “counter-revolutionary” forces began to be implemented with their explicit approval. Those in the communist leadership who did not want or were not able to embrace again the dogmas of Marxism-Leninism and return to the old ways of thinking and familiar habits of communist totalitarian rule were forced to resign one after another. The conservative wing of the Communist Party got back into the saddle. Human freedom discovered and growing during the previous months started to shrink again, and our short-lived revolution was, first inconspicuously, but later openly and explicitly, superseded by the long period of “normalization.” The thorough screening in all ranks of the Communist Party, and later even in the non-communist silent majority of the population, began with the aim of punishing all rebels and cleansing the Czechoslovak society from all “revisionist” and “counter-revolutionary” elements. The law used to suppress by force the spontaneous demonstrations that broke out on the occasion of the first anniversary of the invasion was signed by Alexander Dubček himself.

I observed this regressive trend with disbelief and frustration. I had just begun my university studies in the fall and had participated enthusiastically at the students’ protest strike in November 1968 and at the big students’ demonstration which followed the martyr’s death of Jan Palach. The worst surprise, however, was that the atmosphere changed gradually under the pressure of normalization, even in the student environment. Within less than two years from August 1968, most of my colleagues at the Faculty of Natural Sciences of Charles University were also showing readiness to follow suit and adapt themselves to the new political situation, in order to secure for themselves undisturbed professional lives and university careers. They joined, one after another, a renewed official student organization loyal to the normalization regime; even worse, in all possible interviews and questionnaires—used by “normalizers” not so much to find out what people really thought, but rather to break their resistance—they were ready to express their agreement with the official criticism of “grave political mistakes” made by the “revisionists” during the “period of crisis,” and their consent to the August invasion of the Warsaw Pact armies. No matter what they had said before, what they thought or felt inside, they also dumped easily the Arendtian principles of “public freedom, public happiness, and public spirit” discovered during our revolution,

and fell in line with the changed political circumstances, accepting with little hesitation a “social contract” that was offered by the triumphant “normalizers.”

I was well aware that there was still a clear and stark choice available at the time. One could either agree to play this “game” (and the vast majority of people in Czechoslovakia decided to do so), or to go into exile. In the summer of 1969, I also briefly considered taking the latter step, but in the end, I did not. My question, then, remained. Was there some other option besides emigration or adopting an opportunistic attitude? What about those who decided, for whatever reason, to stay? What about those who either did not have this choice at all, or found it unacceptable or problematic from the standpoint of their moral principles? Or those who simply did not have the stomach to swallow such an overdose of pragmatism and refused to maximize their personal benefits under the given circumstances?

1977

To evoke the atmosphere and the spirit of Charter 77 and also to clarify my personal reasons for adding my signature to this document without much hesitation, I have to depart from the end of my previous anamnestic experiment on 1968, from the depressing atmosphere of normalization of the 1970s. But first things first: according to its original declaration, made January 1, Charter 77 was “a free, informal, open community of people of different convictions, different faiths and different professions united by the will to strive, individually and collectively, for the respect of civic and human rights, both in Czechoslovakia and in the world.”³ What must be mentioned is, however, the connection which emerged for me in this context between the primarily political problem of human rights—violated in a specific manner by our totalitarian regime which metamorphosed in the normalized Czechoslovakia of the 1970s, as Václav Havel put it in one of his best essays from the late 1980s, from its earlier forms in its

³ Quoted from the English version of the Charter 77 Manifesto (<http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/cold.war/episodes/19/documents/charter.77/>).

“advanced” stage⁴—and the essentially theoretical realm of European philosophy.

The man who was the most outspoken and most effective in articulating this connection was one of the first three spokespersons of Charter 77, a retired university professor of philosophy—Jan Patočka. And it needs to be said right away: when he was confronted with this connection in the concrete circumstances of his life under the conditions of late totalitarian regime, he felt obliged to tackle it with adequate philosophical precision. He entered the shaky terrain of dissidence from a *polis* he belonged to as a real philosopher. He brought about an emphasis on maximum existential truthfulness and profundity.

Originally, it was perceived as quite surprising that it was Jan Patočka who assumed, of all other possible candidates—together with playwright Václav Havel and former Czechoslovak minister for foreign affairs in 1968, international lawyer Jiří Hájek—this challenging role, and stood in the forefront of the “dissidents” revolt. Up until the creation of Charter 77, Patočka enjoyed, even among his Marxist opponents, the reputation of a profound theoretical thinker and a renowned academic scholar. He was not regarded as a public intellectual accustomed to expressing his opinions in political discussions, and certainly not as a politician. He was highly thought of in the informed circles of the intelligentsia as a master in his field of study and a great teacher, endowed with exceptional capability to elucidate the history of philosophical ideas, from ancient beginnings to its present state, and to open for his students the gate leading to the wonderful world of Western philosophy. As one of the last pupils of Edmund Husserl, Patočka was perceived not only as an interpreter, but also as an original philosopher. Departing from his teacher’s phenomenological method, he both worked on the history of philosophy, and lectured in his unique manner in front of students. He was simultaneously engaged in his own philosophical investigations focused on the *Lebenswelt* (the natural world of human life) and other fundamental problems of contemporary phenomenology.

⁴ See Václav Havel, “Stories and Totalitarianism,” in *Open Letters: Selected Writings 1965–1990* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 328–354.

For most of his life, Patočka was used to approaching his topics *more philosophico*—following his teacher in making phenomenological “epoche” and observing everything that “is” (*ta onta*) as phenomena (*ta phainomena*). But upon accepting the role of Charter 77’s spokesperson, he significantly altered his previous attitude. He decided, metaphorically speaking, to step down from his philosophical “observatory,” to enter the public realm of his *polis*, which was then going through a serious crisis, and set himself in action. He therefore became one of the leading figures of a movement that openly criticized the political practices and manners in Czechoslovakia at the time, as far as respect for human rights was concerned, and announced his readiness to lead the dialogue about it with the Czechoslovak government.

From the standpoint of international politics and international law, the creation of Charter 77 was inspired by two events: a) the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe was adopted in the summer of 1975; and b) two major international human-rights treaties, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, came into force in Czechoslovakia in the fall of 1976. All these documents provided clear information on the international obligations of the Czechoslovak state to fulfill these covenants “in good faith” and accommodate its legal order and practice to their normative framework.

Surely, the international context played a very important role in Charter 77’s origins and enabled the drafters of its founding document to come up with a number of strong arguments that could be used as the legal basis for its proposed dialogue about human rights with the government and for all its other oppositional activities. Nonetheless, what was crucial in bringing together a group of committed individuals, who were ready to join the initiative and to express support for it by putting their signatures on Charter 77’s original declaration, was not so much Charter 77’s justification, grounded in international politics or law, but the domestic situation in Czechoslovakia, the poisoned atmosphere that prevailed there in the 1970s, the deep spiritual crisis experienced by Czechoslovak society because of the policies of normalization. It was primarily this crisis and not the changed international situation that compelled philosopher Patočka to engage the communist regime and to enter the proposed public debate between the Czecho-

slovak government and Charter 77 with his existential reasoning. And, one has to admit, for the majority of Charter 77's signatories—people who came from all walks of life, Christians of all denominations, Jews, ex-communists expelled from the party for their revolt in 1968, independent liberal intellectuals and quite often just young people without any specific past, creed, goals, or expectations—the “reasons” behind philosopher Patočka's decision to publicly fight this spiritual degeneration were quite compelling even for non-philosophers.

These reasons can still be found in six short texts Patočka wrote in the last weeks of his life, shortly before he died following prolonged police interrogation in March 1977. These articles defend the cause of Charter 77 against its enemies and can be regarded as Patočka's political testament. When these texts are put into the overall context of his life's work, it becomes evident that what he articulated in his capacity of spokesperson of Charter 77 was in a way nothing new, but corresponded to what he set out as the basic mission of all philosophy already in the 1930s. He argued then that the latter's task is not *in abstracto* speculation, but the ability “to criticize life in all its components and manifestations;”⁵ the willingness

to give expression to what society still rudely wants to say, to give its voice to still mute tendencies, but also to expose what is behind them, to demonstrate their genesis, to mark cross-roads, to identify problems, even to try to resolve them.⁶

And indeed, this idea is formulated repeatedly, though in different way, in Patočka's Charter 77 texts: in publicly defending human rights, Charter 77 was not intended to interfere into politics *sensu stricto*—with politics conceived as a power struggle whose basic aim always is and must be to replace those who are momentarily in government. Charter 77's activities had to be strictly limited to a non-political goal, yet one that, for the sake of our humanity, was of crucial importance: by pointing to the individual violations of human rights and proposing the dialogue about it to the ruling power, to resist the devastating conse-

⁵ Jan Patočka, “Kapitoly z současné filosofie” [Chapters from contemporary philosophy], in *Sebrané spisy, Svazek 1, Péče od duši 1*, 96.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 92.

quences the late totalitarianism of the 1970s had for those exposed to its “radiation.”⁷ The Charter 77 activities had to be founded, according to Patočka, on what should not be given up, even under such unfavorable political circumstances, that is, on the moral claim made on each of us to live with integrity. This claim not only turned all participants in the Charter 77 movement into political “dissidents,” thus undermining the totalitarian communist regime, but it also extracted them from the world of sheer lies, pretensions, and endless manipulations. It was a return journey on the path for truth. This claim opened for them the door into the largely forgotten and abandoned realm of classical political philosophy.

In the text *What Charter 77 Is and What It Is Not*,⁸ Patočka decided to bring “to everyone’s clear awareness” the “truths of which we are all in some sense aware”⁹ and also his own philosophical definition of human rights:

The idea of human rights is nothing other than the conviction that even states, even societies as a whole, are subject to the sovereignty of moral sentiment: that they recognize something unconditional that is higher than they are, something that is binding even on them, sacred, inviolable, and that in their power to establish and maintain a rule of law, they seek to express this recognition.¹⁰

According to conventional wisdom, the concept of human rights in the international covenants the authors of the Charter 77 Manifesto were appealing to is rooted in the European Enlightenment of the late eighteenth century. Patočka’s moral argument, however, his cautious reference to “the truths of which we are all in some sense aware,” sounded, when it appeared in January 1977, rather like a voice coming to the present from a distant past, bringing to life something that did not fit

⁷ The metaphorical term “the radiation of totalitarianism” is used in Havel’s essay *Stories and Totalitarianism* (see footnote 15), 349.

⁸ Jan Patočka: “What Charter 77 Is and What It Is Not,” in Erazim Kohák, ed., *Jan Patočka: Philosophy and Selected Writings* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 341.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

well in the contemporary human-rights discourse, but instead belonged to premodern and largely abandoned spiritual traditions. His argument that respect for human rights represents the moral foundation of any human society—that it is our recognition of the sovereignty of moral sentiment and not just our human nature which constitutes them—shifted the focus from the modern emancipated individuals who simply possess human rights as his/her “entitlements,” to the ancient conflict between politics and philosophy. It turned the attention to the trial of Socrates, who seemed to have been the inspiration for Patočka’s approach to political matters in general, and, for his own activities in the public realm, his great example and predecessor.

What is the actual source of political order? What enables a political body, asks Patočka in these texts, notwithstanding recognized customs, valid laws, form of government and all practical aspects of its daily politics, to exist as political body? No matter what politicians themselves have to say on this point, their answer is from the Socratic/Patočkian perspective either insufficient or irrelevant. The adequate response to this question simply cannot come from their realm, but from the sphere outside politics. Even states endowed with the sovereignty to create binding laws, to execute them and to supervise their observance, must first honor something above them. Even sovereign states have to respect the elementary fact that being human precedes any political role one may be assigned as citizen. Not only individual human beings, but states and whole societies must be “subject to the sovereignty of moral sentiment.”¹¹ Signing Charter 77 could not then be perceived, Patočka argued, as a “political act in the strict sense.”¹² Charter 77 “constitutes no competition or interference with political power in any of its functions.”¹³ That is why it is “neither an association, nor an organization,”¹⁴ but just “an outgrowth of the conviction”¹⁵ that society “cannot function without a moral foundation.”¹⁶

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 342.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 341.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Patočka not only reopened the basic question of Socrates in his Charter 77 texts, but also revived in them his spirit. When he said that the Charter 77 Manifesto was “an expression of joy”¹⁷ of our citizens and “also an expression of (their) willingness... to do their part in bringing about the realization and public fulfillment of the principles proclaimed,”¹⁸ it was a Socratic irony that had to fly directly in the face of communist power holders. Considering their ferocious onslaughts against the Charter 77 signatories, it is obvious that they took the statement that “our people have once more become aware that there are things for which it is worthwhile to suffer, that the things for which we might have to suffer are those which make life worthwhile”¹⁹ not as a moral proclamation, but as a kind of declaration of war. When the organs of state security went after Patočka openly, interrogating and trying to intimidate him day after day until he died, his speaking out was a clear act of Socratic courage.

In December 1976, I became acquainted with the text of Charter 77 through a friend, and I was invited to sign it and join others in this adventurous undertaking. I said yes without much hesitation. I did that not so much because of my personal courage, but because at that moment I had already been trapped in the realm of Patočka’s philosophy. It was my response to the marasmus of normalization in the first half of the 1970s, when the entire public domain in Czechoslovakia was again fully manipulated by the totalitarian communist government. Seeing no future for myself in the official academic institutions, or anywhere else where a declaration of loyalty to the regime was required as a kind of admission ticket, and having decided not to emigrate, I decided to forgo the career of scientist or researcher. Instead, I immersed myself in the depths of philosophical literature, reading somewhat eclectically everything from the basic writings of classical Greek philosophers to the works of their contemporary successors and interpreters.

Inspired and occasionally tutored by Patočka and his disciples of the older generations, I tried to become acquainted with the history of philosophical and political ideas: as they emerged for the first time,

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Jan Patočka: “What We Can Expect from Charta 77,” in Kohak, E., *ibid.*, 346.

were forgotten, but re-discovered later, discussed again, interpreted, transformed, and often distorted in the great dialogue of mankind, which started at the very beginning of European history and went on and on over the centuries. In this context, I should add, I also came for the first time upon the names Hannah Arendt and Eric Voegelin.

Looking back from a distance of more than thirty-five years, what I chose could be called hyperbolically *consolatio philosophiae hodierna*, to paraphrase the title of the famous text by Boethius. The first thing I discovered in my search for a kind of Boethian consolation, however, had nothing to do with the content of the philosophical ideas I was keen to study. What I realized instantly was that I certainly was not alone setting out on the journey of philosophy for this reason. On the contrary, the existential and not just academic attitude towards philosophy became quite common in the Czech intellectual environment of that period. In fact it is still preserved in a way—for better or for worse—today. I came to know a number of like-minded philosophical apprentices and started to circulate among various reading or lecture groups, debating societies. But most importantly, at the time my education was founded on the private lectures or seminars of Patočka, who for all of us, represented the highest authority in philosophical matters and became in our world a kind of genuine philosopher-king.

My signature on the Charter 77 Manifesto at that time was nothing more than one step in my journey to philosophy. I started along this road inspired by Patočka and there is little to add. All that followed after January 1977 was just the consequences of my original decision. I realized immediately that I threaded quite dangerous and risky waters. Like any other Charter 77 signatory, I had to accept the status of social pariah. It was a form of exemplary punishment for one's revolt against the ruling power. I had to get used to becoming an occasional target of the attention of repressive organs of the state. I lost my white-collar job and had no other choice than to work, first in a Prague hospital and then, after I was fired again, in a hotel, as a stoker.

But like most other Charter 77 signatories, I could not care less about all these matters. This decision was not only an act of liberation for me, but it enabled me to get acquainted with the most exciting group of like-minded people. Patočka died in March 1977, but an unusual body politic, later named by one of its leading activists, Vaclav

Benda, a “parallel polis,” came into being. It brought together not only the signatories of Charter 77, with all different convictions, faiths, and professions, but also all of those who decided to resist totalitarianism on their own terms.

This body politic—surrounded by the greater whole of which it was a tiny part, finding itself in a permanent state of siege by repressive organs of the state, having no territory, no protective walls, but just its self-appointed citizens—was certainly incapable of independent existence in the world, yet managed to exist until the end of the communist regime in 1989, for almost thirteen years. Thanks to the nature of its foundation, thanks to its rules, citizenship, and, most importantly, because of the external environment in which it had to operate, the “parallel polis” was, indeed, a rather bizarre entity—a “merry ghetto,” as it was also nicknamed. I would certainly hesitate to identify any new political idea whose emergence could be attributed to its existence and which could eventually, when the opportune moment finally came in November 1989, be considered to have inspired our revolutionary action. Nonetheless, there is something here, and I believe that Timothy Garton Ash’s consideration of the matter is quite telling in the context of our discussion. He argued that the very fact that the “parallel polis” came into being represented a new beginning.

Those who signed Charter 77 might have been motivated *more Socialistic*, but surely, they did not take this step alone. They discovered immediately what it meant to leave the protective walls of their private lives, to step into the public space and to reach out to others. They discovered the binding power of acting together. They discovered that the essential political virtue is not the one leading to immediate political success, but the readiness to build relationships of trust, the ability to act in concert, the willingness to support each other in confrontation with all dangers, to keep alive the spirit of solidarity. In short, they discovered, each and every one in his/her own way, on his/her own terms, the fact that, according to Hannah Arendt, creates an elementary precondition of political life: the fact of plurality which is essential to our human condition and which the normalized life of the totalitarian state aimed to obliterate.

As a member of this colorful crowd and becoming, in turn, one of the spokespersons of Charter 77 in 1986, I still tried, in the middle of all other independent or dissident activities, to stick to phi-

losophy. The change after 1977 was only that our “Geistkreisen,”²⁰ operating since then in the environment of the “parallel polis” and for this reason occasionally threatened by repressive operations of the secret police, had become open to all the new instigations and impulses coming from the newly discovered public sphere. It therefore gave us the opportunity of being exposed not only to new questions and new themes, but also to so badly needed new books that were smuggled to us by our friends from abroad. It also offered us the opportunity to listen to distinguished Western philosophers who began to come to visit our “parallel polis” and gave their lectures at our “flying university.”²¹

The Socratic foundations laid down by Patočka that opened, at least for me, the world of classical political philosophy have remained the elementary point of departure for my philosophical journey ever since. I am not sure whether I should be called a Central European phenomenologist as Timothy Garton Ash has presented me in our controversy, because actually I have never been a disciplined student in any school of philosophical thought. When it comes to the debate about political ideas, however, what I simply cannot set aside is the non-academic context in which these ideas were sought, debated, and thought through by us. The thing is that our primary goal in this search was never to study them as such and *in abstracto*, but to understand better with their assistance our own situation. Our fundamental goal was to make better sense of what we had been experiencing. And in this regard I have to add a slight touch of Socratic irony: when we eventually encountered these ideas, and tried to increase with their assistance our otherwise poor capacity of understanding, they were always shining—no matter what Timothy Garton Ash, Francois Furet and many other distinguished interpreters of the 1989 revolutions thought about their age—as if brand new.

²⁰ The *Geistkreis* or “Mind Circle” was a leading Viennese seminar of science and ideas founded by Friedrich Hayek and Herbert Furth in the early 1920s. Among its members were Alfred Schutz, Felix Kaufmann, Fritz Machlup, Gottfried Haberler, Eric Voegelin, Friedrich Engel-Janosi, and Franz Glick.

²¹ Barbara Day, *The Velvet Philosophers* (London: Claridge Press, 1999).

1989

The role the professional revolutionists played in all modern revolutions is great and significant enough, but it did not consist in the preparation of revolutions. They watched and analyzed the progressing disintegration in state and society; they hardly did, or were in a position to do, much to advance and direct it. Even the wave of strikes that spread over Russia in 1905 and led into the first revolution was entirely spontaneous, unsupported by any political or trade-union organizations, which, on the contrary, sprang up only in the course of the revolution. The outbreak of most revolutions has surprised the revolutionist groups and parties no less than all others, and there exists hardly a revolution whose outbreak could be blamed upon their activities. It was usually the other way around: revolution broke out and liberated, as it were, the professional revolutionaries from wherever they happened to be—from jail, or from the coffee house, or from the library.²²

I chose to start my third anamnestic experiment with this sobering remark of Hannah Arendt concerning all “professional revolutionists” of the modern era, because I consider it reasonable advice when the role of dissidents in the Velvet Revolution in November 1989 is to be discussed and evaluated. It certainly corresponds to my own recollection. The story of the Velvet Revolution has already been told so many times, and I am not going to revisit it. What I will do, instead, is make the three following points.

Point one: What, in fact, is a revolution? According to conventional wisdom, it is a historical event *par excellence*, an event that literally makes history, one that radically and irreversibly changes the social and political condition of human life. Most important, though, is the revolution’s subjective element. It is an event that has to be recognized as such, not only by its immediate participants, but by all those who are going to be affected by it. Based on my personal experience with revolution in 1989, Arendt is absolutely right that it is not something that

²² Hannah Arendt, op. cit., 263.

can be “made” by men. Revolution is certainly not a man-made thing, but a radical break, a discontinuity in the human perception of time, a dramatic moment of truth, when we realize that our tomorrow will be different from our yesterday, that from this moment we are going to be living in a new world. To illustrate this point and to demonstrate the drama in our souls in a moment in which such recognition occurs, I will quote again from Arendt’s *On Revolution* again:

The date was the night of the fourteenth of July 1789, in Paris, when Louis XVI heard from the Duc de La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt of the fall of the Bastille, the liberation of a few prisoners, and the defection of the royal troops before a popular attack. The famous dialogue that took place between the king and his messenger is very short and very revealing. The king, we are told, exclaimed: “C’est une révolte,” and Liancourt corrected him: “Non, Sire, c’est une révolution.”²³

By recalling this conversation in the context of my own anamnesis, I certainly do not intend to place, without any further qualification, the events I was part of in Prague, in November 1989, into the same category with the events in France two hundred years earlier. And what I would least like to do is compare my own “dramatic” encounter with history at that time with the truly tragic situation of French king Louis XVI, not only bearing in mind the incomparable consequences which the confusion of the terms “révolte” and “révolution” had for him and could have, obviously in the opposite direction, for me and other “Velvet revolutionaries.”

I actually remember very well the moment when I, at least intuitively, started to feel that what we were experiencing could be “*révolution*,” and not just another “*révolte*”—despite the fact that in the days ahead we had to expect realistically and to be prepared that the revolutionary process in which we played quite a significant role, could be forcefully reversed. It happened at one of these first big demonstrations on Wenceslas Square, organized by Civic Forum, a revolutionary steering body of which I was a member. Speeches were delivered and songs sung from the balcony on the third floor of a house on the square.

²³ Ibid., 40–41.

The intention was to send a clear and straightforward message to the crowd, at first a little surprised, but later absolutely excited and ever-growing. It was at the third of these public rallies, if I am correct, that Alexander Dubček arrived. Brought from Bratislava, he appeared in public for the first time after twenty years of invisibility and addressed the jubilant revolutionary gathering. I do not know why, but I decided that day not to stay with the other rally organizers in the area around the rostrum for speakers, who were quickly lining up as the revolution was progressing, but to go down and observe the scene from the square. I already knew what was approaching. In the evening twilight a singer, Marta Kubišová, appeared on the balcony and started to sing “Prayer for Marta,” a song that became, as Václav Havel recently put it, a kind of unofficial anthem of 1968. People on the square, I think, most of them with tears in their eyes, started spontaneously to light candles they brought with them, without being “officially” instructed to do so. That was it. The message could not have been stronger. I realized that the revolution that had died in the streets of Prague more than twenty years ago had finally returned. To be understood correctly: as far as “ideas” are concerned, no one I know of, except for a few ’68ers, desired to revive the project of “socialism with a human face,” which had been once and for all buried in August of 1968. What had to be brought back to life, if we wanted liberty, and not a reformed version of illiberal order, were the three Arendtian principles of public freedom, public happiness, and public spirit, so easily abandoned and forgotten in the years of normalization. And what I saw on Wenceslas Square that night was that they were back, indeed, and at least for some time were ready to “inspire” Czechs and Slovaks, to wake them up, to bring them into a disciplined, well-organized and bold collective action.

Point two is the noetic dimension of revolutionary action itself and the corresponding epistemology. I will start with the observation of Petr Pithart, a leading activist of the revolution of 1989, one of the few Charter 77 signatories with some political experience and qualifications, who was to become Czech prime minister immediately after the victorious Velvet Revolution. I remember that he once told me, trying to articulate the experience he had as one of the negotiators of Civic Forum with their counterparts of the *ancien régime*, the following: being in the very center of revolutionary action during the days that fol-

lowed November 17, 1989, could hyperbolically be compared to being at the center of a nuclear explosion. Therefore, to continue his metaphor, dragged by forces released in a moment when two subcritical amounts of radioactive material combined, with their vision paralyzed by the blinding flash of the chain reaction, the representatives of Civic Forum—a group of hastily selected individuals, some of them certainly not very well prepared for this job—had to cope with, and prudently react to, an absolutely new and largely unexpected situation. Sitting at the round table with their well-trained opponents, who were backed by the repressive organs of the state, still ready to intervene in its defense, they had to proceed without a clear democratic mandate, master plan, or strategy thoroughly prepared in advance, just feeling their way, applying trial and error, not knowing well their opponents and their real intentions. This negotiation evolved day after day, not only with all Czechoslovak citizens around and the whole democratic world watching, but also with major international actors playing their game of balancing power, communicating through their secret lines and carrying about their geostrategic “national interests.” The only democratic feedback the negotiators could rely on was the daily consultations with other members of the broader leadership of Civic Forum. However, the steering body of the Velvet Revolution itself had only a very limited mandate, being composed of representatives of loose networks of civic initiative, comprising a number of self-appointed individuals who either had credentials from their past activities within the “parallel polis” or were co-opted in the course of the Velvet Revolution. The negotiators were obviously not only supposed to keep this body informed of their interim achievements. They also needed to obtain approval for the next steps, and that could happen only after a thorough and, for the most part, protracted but hardly productive or result-oriented discussion.

The lesson to be drawn from what I described above, using just quick brush strokes to evoke the picture of daily routines of the Velvet Revolution, is as follows: those who would like to explore the political ideas animating revolutions should first consider the inherent, or one can say, using the medical terminology, “endemic” features of the human situation in which all the “revolutionists”—either professionals aptly described and mocked by Hannah Arendt, or amateurs like most Czechoslovak dissidents in 1989, who could be in many ways ridiculed

as well—were finding themselves. What should not be forgotten is the blindness that strikes all who are doomed, as Pithart, to act and make decisions in the middle of a nuclear explosion. Revolutionary action is taking place in a state of epistemological chaos and total uncertainty. To talk about a “surprising” absence of new political ideas in the European revolution of 1989, as Francois Furet and Timothy Garton Ash did, may make sense from the standpoint of an outside observer of revolutionary events. However, it simply ignores the basic nature of the revolutionary’s playing field. It is out of touch with the immediate experience of those who, for some reason, happened to have played the game. The question, then, is how to consider their perspective and reconcile it with that of the *spectateurs engagés*. How can one increase the participant’s capacity of understanding and judgment in the context of an event primarily experienced as a discontinuity in time? And, in reality, the interchangeability of these roles does belong to human nature, doesn’t it? Are we not both actors and first observers of events that comprise the history of our lives? Do we find ourselves suddenly caught up in these events, or, to return to Hannah Arendt, are we situated in such moments in a “gap” between our past and our future? Is it surprising that she quotes, when referring to this gap, Alexis de Tocqueville, who also apparently saw no new political ideas when he arrived in America to study its revolution? And in the conclusion of his lengthy work, which is still an unmatched masterpiece of the discipline, he had nothing more to say than to express his noetic uncertainty:

Although the revolution that is taking place in the social condition, the laws, the ideas, the opinions and the feelings of men is still very far from being terminated, yet its results already admit of no comparison with anything that the world has ever before witnessed. I go back from age to age up to the remote antiquity, but I find no parallel to what is occurring before my eyes; as the past has ceased to throw its light upon the future, the mind of man wanders in obscurity.²⁴

²⁴ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 2 (New York: Alfred. A. Knopf, 1945), 331.

And finally, point three. In the two previous remarks I tried to recall the direct experience of revolution—the situation we were a part of, caught in its enormous power, where the only thing we could do was wait and see where we would end up. My third remark concerns my realization for the first time, in the middle of all the hectic activities, typical of the months following November 17, 1989, that our revolution was already behind us. I still remember the shock I experienced sometime in the spring of 1990 when I first read an article, written not by a professional propagandist from the previous era, trained to distort reality in conformity with its official ideological interpretation, but by someone who apparently spoke from the bottom of his heart. The author was explaining what happened in the Velvet Revolution and especially Charter 77's role in a way at odds with my own perceptions and experiences. According to this version, what happened was not revolution at all but just a plot on a large scale, a secret deal made between the forces of the *ancien régime* of the Communist Party and their Charter 77 counterparts, who only pretended to be in opposition and only wanted power. Even if this particular article was crazy enough to be tossed aside—bringing in the old and well-worn arguments of Zionism and Judeo-Masonic conspiracy—the moment I read it, I realized an inconvenient truth. Paradoxically, thanks to its success, the Velvet Revolution, as a genuine historical or, rather, history-making event, was no longer in the hands of those who had taken part in it, who had become, whether by choice or necessity, temporary “revolutionists.” It was a legacy that no one could claim. In this sense, the Velvet Revolution was still “ours,” but only as expressed in the aphorism of French poet and writer René Char, quoted at the very beginning of Hannah Arendt's *Between Past and Future*, where he “compressed the gist” of what four years in the *résistance* against the Nazis meant for those who took part in it: as “our inheritance” that “was left to us by no testament.”²⁵

²⁵ Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 3.

IRENA GRUDZINSKA GROSS

1968 in Poland

Spoiled Children, Marxists, and Jews

The forty years of historical distance should bring some equanimity to the protagonists of 1968 and their stern judges. Yet the blame and (self-)accusations are as bitter as ever. I would like, therefore, before I talk about Poland, to start with a general defense of 1968.

I am speaking as a member of the 1968 generation, and my memory is not only individual but also generational. Such memory, and all autobiographical history, has its obvious limitations, but it should not be discarded, particularly today, when the '68ers are being pushed out of the limelight by the following generations. Nineteen sixty-eight now belongs to history, yet in judging an event of the past, intentions, illusions, aspirations of the participants do matter. Hungarian theater director Ivan Nagel once wrote that our own biography is not a finished book in which we have access simultaneously to all the pages. In writing about 1968 in Poland, I want to contribute not to my biography, but to the way in which the 1968 generation remembers itself.

The generation of 1968 matured in the shadow of World War II and in the chill of the Cold War. Perhaps the most important aspect of its generational rebellion was the breaking of the barrier of fear that circumscribed, slightly differently in each of our countries, the possibilities of social intercourse. And since the rebellion was generational, that barrier was broken also horizontally, across geographical and political barriers. It is secondary in this context that the students in Poland or in Czechoslovakia demanded more parliamentary democracy, while students in France or Germany were anarcho-communist. This difference serves to attack the Western '68ers as spoiled children and extol their Eastern peers as proto-dissidents or freedom fighters. The East European students, by the way, were also routinely accused in their

own countries of having been spoiled children manipulated in their protests by all-knowing and all-powerful political police. The slogans of both East European and West European students were cloaked in the language of Marxism; Marxist vocabulary was then the language of opposition, or, to quote Agnes Heller, the language of social outrage. Nineteen sixty-eight was a movement of those who were outraged, and there were several and serious reasons for such social feeling: ongoing wars and colonial occupations, social inequalities, and authoritarian controls over private lives. Nineteen sixty-eight was a movement against the Yalta agreement, an anti-authoritarian revolt on both sides of the Iron Curtain. It was also a rebellion against the grip of the war generation, founded on silences about the recent past, especially about World War II. As in a Freudian dream, the secrets of our parents' past—of what they did, what they witnessed, and what was done to them—weighed heavily on the lives of the entire generation. Their past blocked our future.

One of the reasons why the quarrel over 1968 is still so bitter is the difficulty in judging its results. Nowhere did students seek power, and nowhere did they take it. Instead, after substantial havoc, they started to live differently. They unblocked a new future of more social and sexual freedom, more equality, more flexibility. A very important result of 1968, which I will talk about later, is the demise of communism. My generational memory of 1968, therefore, is very positive, although for me, as an individual, the March 1968 events in Poland were quite disastrous. I think that it is a typical contradiction and it, too, colors that debate.

I will return at the end of this article to the similarities and differences between Eastern and Western student rebellions, but for now let me move to the Polish '68. At the beginning of March 2008, the fortieth anniversary of the 1968 events was commemorated in Poland. During one of the conferences devoted to these events, the former prime minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki said about one of the victims of 1968, his friend the writer Jerzy Zawieyski, that in that epoch his personal destiny met and clashed with historical fate. I can certainly say the same about our generation, since 1968 was a year of radical discontinuity for people born soon after World War II. Of course, it was not the only rupture in postwar Polish history, and probably not the most important one. But it was the midpoint in the life expectancy of

communism in Poland (1945–1989). And for many of us it was the moment in which personal fate met with historical fate.

While the chronology of the events of 1968 in Czechoslovakia, France, or the United States, is quite well-known, the so-called “March events” in Poland remain obscure. They had run their course, in fact, before “1968” opened in other countries, and, later, were overshadowed by the Warsaw Pact armies’ invasion of Czechoslovakia. Let me offer, then, a short account of what happened. The months of March and April 1968 in Poland were marked by a broad mutiny of students, intelligentsia, and workers demonstrating against the sclerotic power of the Polish Communist Party and its authoritarian policies. There were tens of thousands of people who participated in this rebellion—demonstrations, marches, occupation strikes—most of them in their late teens or early twenties. Although it is commonly assumed that only intelligentsia (professors, writers, artists, or teachers) and students took part in the protests, we know now from the police files that among the arrested there were many more workers than students, and the common category was the age of the arrested. These were people born after the war. They did not ask for national independence or the introduction of markets: it would have been totally unrealistic. But they (we) did ask for more national sovereignty, the democratization of life in Poland, and the release of arrested peers.

The events started gradually. As their initial date one could take, somewhat arbitrarily, January 30, 1968, that is, the day of the first demonstration after the closing of a theater performance of a national classic. (The crisis, of course, started earlier; some date it to the Six-Day War, some even to the 1956 crushing of Budapest.) As the end, one could take the date of August 21, 1968, the day of the invasion of Czechoslovakia by five armies of the Soviet-bloc countries. The mechanism of these events, as the historian Andrzej Friszke has stated, acted like a spiral; one thing led to another, action to reaction. A then-common interpretation of the spiraling of these events was a conspiracy theory: the crisis was to be instigated and manipulated by one group of the Communist Party apparatus against another (with students—the spoiled children—acting as unaware agents of the dark forces). In other words, it was an internal communist affair. Such interpretations were in tune with the prevailing pessimism and suspiciousness, leading to resignation and passivity. As in the poetry of

Zbigniew Herbert, the system was believed to be always victorious, an individual always condemned to a lonely defeat (though for Herbert, such an existential situation did not lead to passivity but to a hopeless individual revolt). Also, active efforts at manipulation were indeed present. They took the shape of an intra-party fight of the younger generation of party apparatchiks trying to unseat their older colleagues who blocked their party advancement. Still, the massive revulsion among young people at the brutality of a despised regime was linked with the belief that it was at least in part reformable. It was a non-violent protest aimed at applying pressure for reform. More freedom, more honesty, more equality: these were the main demands of the rebellious '68ers in Poland.

There were two main theaters in which the March events played out: the street (and prison) and the party corridors. At the beginning of the month, the street protests, which spread like wildfire around the country, were violently repressed. Schools and universities were closed; prisons overflowed. Altogether, almost 28,000 people were arrested and variously punished or released. The "patriotic" younger communists of General Mieczysław Moczar were maneuvering to oust First Party Secretary Władysław Gomułka. On March 19, Gomułka delivered a speech to a large congress of party activists. He adopted the main points of Moczar's agenda and gave the signal for a large-scale purge in various state and party institutions, including the army; the purge was directed mostly, but not only, against people of Jewish origin. Accompanied by the enthusiastic screams of the activists, he encouraged Jews to emigrate. This large party manifestation was prepared for and followed by a massive mobilization of party members and working people alike. Party activists organized meetings in factories, offices, and other places of work, during which those present expressed support for the party leadership and condemnation of "trouble-makers" and "Zionists." The state and party organs recast old anti-Semitic propaganda as anti-Zionism, and approximately 13,000 people of Jewish origin abandoned Poland. Gomułka remained in power, but only for less than two years. In December 1970, he ordered a massacre of workers returning to work from strikes in the shipyards of Gdynia and Gdańsk, and was replaced by the Silesia party boss, Edward Gierek. Remembrance of the killed workers helped to create the independent trade union *Solidarność*.

The purges of 1968 brought many personal tragedies, and this is what Tadeusz Mazowiecki had in mind when he mentioned Zawieyski. As a result of his courageous defense of arrested students, Zawieyski was maligned by government propaganda, and expelled from his post as a parliamentarian. He then had a heart attack and, in mysterious circumstances, fell out of a window of a government hospital. Prison sentences, emigration, and trials were imposed on tens of thousands of people. Though Polish workers remained restless, as the riots of December 1970 demonstrated, the Polish intelligentsia was pacified. In the humanities departments of all universities, "March docents" were introduced: these were people nominated to their academic positions for their loyalty to the party, and their political zeal most often went along with professional ignorance. They would control universities (but also publishing houses and media) for years to come. Also, the purges made Poland almost free of Jews—the ethnic cleansing of World War II was nearly completed. In the last population census in Poland, in 2002, out of 39 million inhabitants, 1,133 people declared that they were Jewish, only 21 more than those who declared they were Bulgarian (these were simply foreigners—Bulgarians are not, and never were, a minority in Poland). But not all the results of 1968 were negative, though one could not predict it at the time. The most important part of the story was, as I already mentioned, the coming death of communism.

The March events in Poland turned even the left-leaning, "revisionist" intelligentsia and students totally against the system. Their hopes of reform were met with violence, scorn, and anti-Semitic purges. The subsequent invasion of Czechoslovakia was, I believe, a symbolic act of suicide by the communist regime—it was a final confirmation that it was not going to evolve, that all the "revisionist," "socialism with a human face" ideas that the opposition within the system could still entertain would not work out, as the system was unresponsive and rigid. Twenty years later, that rigidity turned into *rigor mortis*. The March events marked the end of any hope of or belief in working within the system. They forced the opposition-minded people to turn their back on "socialism with a human face" and look beyond. Human rights and "living in truth" were next.

I spoke about fear, but the generation that came of age in Poland of 1968 was at first very optimistic. That optimism was an optimism of

the moment, due to the energy of youth, lack of memory, a sense of security that turned to have been false. Born after the end of the war and growing up on the ruins of our cities, we were convinced that no new war was possible, that a lesson had been learned about the inconceivable absurdity of such destruction. (Certainly, part of this conviction was due to the rejection of state propaganda that was continuously trying to instill a fear of “West German revanchists.”) The technological future seemed bright for all humanity. Socialism was an ideology that painted a bright image of the future and, for a time, seemed to contain at least semi-democratic potential. The idea could be right, the implementation imperfect: protesting and pressuring seemed logical. In our protests, we meant to fulfill the traditional role of Polish intelligentsia, to be a bearer of universal values and to act in the name of the entire society. All of our schooling stressed this traditional role, and one could move into it almost automatically.

Not only were we optimistic, but we also did not recognize our fears. Our parents had their reasons to be afraid, but we were innocent of them. We had not experienced Stalinism, we were too young for that, and the thaw of 1956—the idea of a more just and free society—was the betrayed standard that we wanted to return to and to move forward from. Moreover, in everyday life, we felt constrained and oppressed by the rigidity of our parents and our society, of a political system that was ridiculously pompous, false, inefficient, hypocritical, unjust. Public life was run in the same way our schools were: the first party secretary behaved like an irate teacher, scolding the society, punishing the irreverent, rewarding the opportunists and liars. There was a joke about a conversation between two peasants learning that a party delegation was coming to their village. One says: “They are coming to collectivize us, they will make us die of hunger.” And the other replies: “Yes, they will make us die, but not of hunger—they will bore us to death.” I know that it sounds naïve, but we could not stand that boredom. We wanted to escape the puritanical control of our elders, to read what we wanted, to wear long hair and colored stockings, to dance to the music of the Beatles. Some of us even believed in free love! (There is a problem here, and throughout, with my use of the pronoun “we.”) Such were the motivations of our activities: the sense of responsibility, but also of restlessness, and self-indulging optimism.

The leaders of the student movement were accused of either being Jewish themselves or being manipulated by the Jews, who were called “Zionists.” [Again, there was a joke about it. A son asks his father: “Daddy, how do you spell the word ‘Zionist’?” “I don’t know, son, but before the war it was spelled ‘J-E-W.’”] In the famous phrase used in his March 19, 1968, speech, Gomułka said that people needed to have just one fatherland, and those who had two were free to emigrate to Israel. For many in the postwar generation, political use of their Jewish origin was a bitter surprise. First of all, anti-Semitism was not very visible in the public life of Poland in the early sixties—that is, in the time in which that generation became conscious of politics and what we now call “identities.” Second, some among us who were of Jewish origin did not identify ourselves as such; 1968 was a hard way to be “outed”—to learn about it and absorb it. For our parents, of course, the shock was of a different nature: they knew anti-Semitism all too well from the war and the thirties, but they did not expect to encounter it in the People’s Republic of Poland. Those who were worried about such a recurrence had emigrated already.

There are two issues here. One is state anti-Semitism. The other is the Jewish origin of many of the leaders of the 1968 revolt. I do not know that anyone has made a sustained study of the origin of the leaders of 1968, but it seems that such Jewish origins were observable not only in Poland, but also in France and in the United States. If it is true, the question is what led all these young people—Jews or of Jewish origin, born after the Holocaust, to be so prominently involved in student protests?

During the conference on 1968 in which Tadeusz Mazowiecki memorialized his friend Zawieyski, another speaker, Aleksander Smolar, addressed this issue. He gave two tentative answers to the question. First, he said, “ours was the last generation of Jews motivated by universal values.” Second, he proposed, more tentatively, that there was an unconscious will to act against the accusation of “passivity” of the Jewish victims of the Holocaust. I would add a third reason, even more tentatively, though it could be read as just another version of the reasons Smolar gave: being born after the Holocaust, the 1968 Jews felt, again unconsciously, that their lives were not to be lived only for themselves, that they/we needed to justify our presence in the world, to make it useful. These, of course, are only

speculations, since there is no Freud who can diagnose the unconscious of history.

I assume that the Jewish origin of many student leaders was something that made March events similar to those in the West. Yet, of course, the overwhelming majority of the people involved in March events were not Jews, and the same is true of student revolts in all the countries. There were other similarities that I mentioned at the beginning of my paper: an obvious one of protesting against our parent-state; rejection of power and the effort of pushing the power away from our lives. These were basic similarities that make for easy contact and understanding between the representatives of that generation in the world. But I want to return to the differences between East and West. Two of them are the most salient: the attitude towards communism and parliamentary democracy and the official anti-Semitism.

The attitudes towards democracy are strikingly different. Czech, Polish, and Slovak students wanted not only freedom in their personal lives, but also more democracy in public life. Students in the West took democratic government for granted and were fascinated by various communist sectarian ideas like Maoism, Trotskyism, and Che Guevarism. The sectarian communist and anarcho-communist groups and ideas were directed not only against the state establishment but also against the communist parties which constituted the political opposition forces in France, Italy, or other European countries. It was an anarchic dream of “true” communism, and these sects were directed against “the Church.” The sects and grouplets were experimenting with communal living, shared property, sex, and drugs—everything the communist establishment was against. It was the life-after-death of communism, its vestigial existence. So yes, communism kept dying for a while longer among the West European students, and it was an interesting death. The real difference was the fascination with violence by a minority on the left which was completely absent from Eastern European movements. Since this fascination produced terrorism in three formerly fascist countries—Italy, Germany, and Japan—it is unclear to me to what extent it was linked to the persistence of the belief in class warfare, and not to the continuation of the tradition of violence. I do not want to exculpate communism; I do not think, however, that violence was an important characteristic of 1968 in Europe, unless one takes into consideration the violence of the state.

The second difference was the official anti-Semitism. In all the countries that experienced student movements, the governments proclaimed that the students were manipulated by external forces. In France and Germany it was hinted that these forces were foreign, perhaps somehow linked to international Jewish organizations, but nowhere was this stated officially by the governing powers—nowhere but in Poland. The Communist Party used most of the arguments and tactics of classical anti-Semitism, including reprinting the “Protocols of the Elders of Zion” (it was an initiative of the Łódź party organization, and they were censured for it by central party powers). This anti-Semitism seemed to be an effort on the part of the party leadership to ingratiate itself with “the people,” to direct criticism onto “the Jew,” to scare the intelligentsia, and to have a pretext for a generational purge and change within the apparatus. These explanations sought to rationalize the political decision to launch an anti-Semitic campaign, a decision astounding in a country where the extermination of Jews by the Nazis had been carried out only 25 years before.

We need to remind ourselves that at the end of the 1960s, the issue of the Holocaust did not dominate historical thought about World War II. Indeed, the 1968 movement opened that topic, especially in Germany. In Poland, there was a heavy silence surrounding the very formulaic talk of the six million Polish citizens that perished during the war. Sometimes it was mentioned that “three million of them were of Jewish origin.” As you may remember, the monument in Auschwitz mentioned all the nationalities except Jews. The postwar generation in Poland had not been equipped to even start to comprehend the real dimensions of the destruction of Polish Jews. Here again, I am moving into that problematic “we”: for many of us, the reappearance of anti-Semitism constituted the personal side of the encounter with history that Tadeusz Mazowiecki mentioned. As I emigrated from Poland, it was Luigi Pintor, an Italian communist dissenter from the *Il Manifesto* group, who was the first person to point out to me how astonishing and horrible it was that anti-Semitism could be part of the official language in Poland. I did not understand his point; I did not consider the anti-Jewish part of party propaganda as anything other than propaganda and manipulation, as empty as anything else the party said or used. Again, I was not the only one who thought in this way. In fact, when one looks at consecutive Polish commemorations of 1968 events

(illegal ones till 1989, and then more or less official) one can see that the Jewish aspects of events—the propaganda, the purge, the expulsion, what one of the historians called a symbolic pogrom (Stola)—are coming more and more to the forefront. During the already mentioned commemorations of the beginning of last year, those aspects became predominant.

There are, of course, many interpretations of the 1968 events in Poland. March is one of the months on the standard list of postwar anti-government eruptions, together with October (of 1956), December (of 1970), and August (of 1980), when *Solidarność* was born. “March” was a movement of intelligentsia, students, and workers in a country that had almost no Jews. But the reappraisal of the March events shows how history lives, and now the Jewish dimension dominates, overwhelming all other aspects of that, after all, non-Jewish rebellion. For the first time, the ex-students who emigrated in 1968 were invited to participate in the commemoration as Jews or as those who were expelled because of their origin. For the first time, they decided to come as a group. Something changed.

It was a singular moment in history. For several years now there has been a continuous clash between two visions of Polish history. A few months before the fortieth anniversary celebration, Jan Gross’s book *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz* was published by a Catholic publishing house in Kraków, Znak, and aroused a violent debate. The book, which spoke about the anti-Semitism lingering in Poland even after the country’s liberation from Germany, proposed a reading of immediate postwar history that went counter to the commonly accepted version. Yet, at the same time it attempted to overcome the rigid and almost absolute divide that separates the history of Poles and the history of Polish Jews. There had been two histories of World War II, one of what happened to the Polish population, the other, written by different historians, of what happened to the Polish Jews. The Holocaust was conceived as a part of German-Jewish history only, not part of Polish history, where it also belongs. The commemoration of 1968 became part of that debate. It is a debate that opens rather than closes this history which, as it retreats in time, becomes closer and clearer, and remains as painful as before.

I do not suggest that this is the last word in the history of March 1968 in Poland. I can imagine that a future historian, free of the anti-

Left allergy that currently afflicts Polish intellectual life, will rewrite the March events as a story of workers' rebellion, a revolt of the first-generation workers, born in the countryside, but grown and educated in the dormitories of the new industrial projects. They, just like the students, were fed utopian dreams and measured them against reality. We know that they were more numerous than students on the streets and in prisons. They need to find their place in the chronicle of 1968.

The year 1968 is still in the atelier of history. The bitterness of our conflicts about its meaning—the generally negative grade that the '68ers are receiving for their self-indulgence, utopian thinking, and tendency to violence or to naiveté—will probably last as long as the autobiographical voices are clamoring to be heard. Forgetting is also part of the work of history. Perhaps it will be accompanied by forgiving.

DICK HOWARD

In Search of a New Left

Officially, I left the University of Texas for Paris in the summer of 1966 as a Fulbright scholar. What I wanted in fact to learn was how to make a revolution—or at least to understand the Marxist theory that had been identified with this skill. I had taken part in the civil rights movement, and demonstrated against the war in Vietnam; but both of these movements seemed to be caught in the trap of using the language of liberalism against the liberal system. What was needed instead, it seemed, was a framework that would permit a radical transformation of the liberal system; not just racial integration and global peace but a new and superior form of equality that would make liberty real.

Why study Marxism in France? I did not know at the time that French Marxists had made few contributions to Marxist theory, although I would learn quickly that beneath their rhetorical manipulation of concepts, there was a dogged dogmatism. Indeed, that is what permitted them to manipulate so easily. What captivated the mind of this young American was the contrast between our liberal revolution, which did not even abolish slavery, and daring attempts in France to pass from 1789 to 1793, from political rights to socio-economic equality, already anticipating what would come in 1917... only to disappear under the weight of a bureaucracy.

Finally, there was the contrast between Anglo-American ordinary language philosophy that was deliberately apolitical (as John McCumber shows in *Time in a Ditch*¹) and what we called “continental” philosophy. This was reinforced by the fact that translations of

¹ John McCumber, *Time in a Ditch: American Philosophy and the McCarthy Era* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001).

Marx were easily available in French, whereas they were only beginning to appear in English. My three volumes of *Capital* (plus *Theories of Surplus Value*) had been published in Moscow; only Volume One was easily available from the Modern Library classical series.

With these premises, I thought that I could combine the heritage of the old Left with the virtues of the new, going beyond liberalism without losing the liberties it claimed to protect.

After some adaptation, linguistic and social, I found myself a room in the dormitory at the recently opened Nanterre campus, where I set out to read *Capital*. My window overlooked the shanty town close to campus, from which arose a yellow smoke attesting to the misery of the inhabitants of its shacks; but that *bidonville* remained a *terra incognita*. I did, however, continue protesting the war in Vietnam. This drew me to the attention of an underground organization that had been created by former militants against the war in Algeria, who had maintained their radical goals, deciding now to work with American deserters. Although they taught me some of the techniques of underground work, my contribution was minimal. I was not convinced that radical change could come from clandestine action. But I still wanted radical change.

The anti-war protests escalated; on March 22, the students at Nanterre occupied the administration building. General assemblies of the student body had often seemed to me confused and dogmatic. I remember one in which a fierce debate embroiled proponents of a resolution, over whether it should support “the peasants and workers” or “the workers and peasants” struggling in some country few of us knew. At issue, I think, was the “scientific” view that only workers could make a true revolution, which meant that the peasantry had to remain subordinate to their leadership, even in agricultural countries where the working class was tiny. Then, at a meeting on April 2, I heard a language free of the dogmatism of the *a priori* revolutionaries. Something had happened. People were talking with one another, not looking for signs of the future course of World History. They sounded like my friends from the civil rights movement. After the morning’s General Assembly, the students formed working groups. I proposed a tactic I had tried in the United States: the creation of free universities, where we who wanted to learn for ourselves could escape the dominance of the “system.” This declaration of autonomy would make possible an education for autonomy.

As the student movement became increasingly radical in its tactics, the critique of these “enragés” became livelier. That term was employed to devalue the demands by the students. The student reply was contained in a tract distributed at Nanterre by the March 22 movement, “Pourquoi les sociologues?” The pamphlet challenged the co-optation of social scientists who were being trained only to discipline the working class. The answer, of course, was that sociologists are there to regiment and discipline the working class. This was their declaration of educational autonomy. I arranged for publication of the tract in the May 1968 issue of *Esprit*. By coincidence, the same issue contained a short comment called “Résister” that I had written under the shock of the assassination of Martin Luther King on April 4. In it, I appropriated the words of King’s phrase that reflected the radicalization of his thought: “From protest to resistance.” I wrote the last word with a capital R, wanting to indicate that my dream of revolution remained. My idea was that resistance was a method that could unmask liberalism, confronting its unjust practices with the principles that it professed, and demonstrating the need for personal autonomy.

Then came the closing of the University of Nanterre, and the use of tear gas against the protesters at Sorbonne. This unleashing of police repression put a premature end to the course on *Capital* that I had been giving as part of a mini-free university that I had organized in a small room on the second floor of the bookstore Shakespeare & Company. We had just come to the crucial account of the “theory of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall,” the analysis in Volume 3 that is supposed to prove convincingly the internal self-contradiction of capitalism. I should perhaps have read this unexpected termination of the reading as a sign that a certain Marxist-historicist orthodoxy had lost whatever hold it may have had on reality. That recognition would come soon enough. At the time, I think that I recalled instead the concluding chapter of Lenin’s *State and Revolution*, written during the period between the February Revolution and the Bolshevik seizure of power. Lenin’s text breaks off abruptly, leaving the chapter on the Russian revolutionary experience unwritten because, as he explains in his postscript, “It is more pleasant and useful to go through the ‘experience of revolution’ than to write about it.”²

² V. I. Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, translated, edited, and with an introduction by Robert Service (London: Penguin Classics, 1993).

The police were unable to prevent the students from occupying their university buildings. Various committees were organized, classrooms became meeting places, and the larger amphitheaters were used for meetings to discuss propositions from below. Meanwhile, the revolt spread to the factories. What contributions could we Americans make to the accelerating events? Summer vacation brought to Paris many American students who had no idea of the stakes of the student revolt, and how it had become a worker's rebellion. This was all the more regrettable, since the massive protests at Columbia University in April, as well as the tactics of the anti-Vietnam War movement, had influenced the spirit of the French student rebels at Nanterre. With some friends, I took part in creating an "American Action Committee." This was only logical, since we were convinced that our movement would be international; its aims went beyond France, however necessary France's reform might be.

Faithful to the "revolutionary" spirit that had swept through the country, the American Action Committee tried to make contact with other participants in the great upheaval. One of the members of our committee, who was of Serbian origin, went to the factories to try to organize the immigrant workers. The majority felt more useful as participants in the student movement. Nevertheless, we wanted to make a connection with the world of the workers, and this led to a meeting with young workers at Renault, organized with Daniel Mothé, a militant from the group *Socialisme ou Barbarie* whom I knew from *Esprit*. It quickly became clear that we had no chance of influencing the politics of the trade unions; our contribution would come with the debate about university reform by which the establishment was attempting to co-opt the movement. These reformists were recommending that France adopt the American system with all its inequalities (those of different universities, their professorial staff, and the cost of education). We thought we could offer insight into the drawbacks of this idea, sending members of the committee to different debates and meetings. But time was running out. Radical reform does not take place so quickly, it appeared; reality is tenacious, vested interests exist, even the most militant get tired.

Near the end of May, the national paralysis ended; gasoline returned on a glorious weekend, which happened to be the Pentecost. Whereas it had been possible to walk slowly and peacefully down the

middle of the Boulevard Saint Michel, debating with one's neighbors rather than bustling headlong toward a private rendezvous, now everyone was free to follow personal whims. The traffic jams that were so enormous on the roads leading out of Paris should have warned people, but the leisure society triumphed over the incipient search for collective autonomy that had been initiated at Nanterre.

A hope remained, however; at least for would-be Marxist intellectuals for whom history seems always to offer lessons of hope: could Pierre Mendès-France, the great hope of moral socialism, become France's Kerensky? After all, Kerensky's temporary rise to power after February 1917 had given the Bolsheviks time to teach the working class the true stakes of the revolution. Many hoped that Mendès-France could play a similar role as a temporary prime minister. This was one of the reasons for the final mass meeting of the movement at the Charléty Stadium on May 27. In fact, rather than a crescendo, this meeting essentially signified the end of the French movement. As a result, my own revolution now became international, *faute de mieux*.

With the return of gasoline, it became possible to travel. My first trip was to London, to pick up my younger brother, who had been unable to get plane tickets to France. Two contradictory surprises awaited me. I was invited to a diner with some members of the editorial committee of the *New Left Review*, where C. Wright Mills had earlier published his famous "Letter to the New Left." The editor-in-chief, Perry Anderson, had just returned from Albania, where he was one of the first Western intellectuals invited to the country of the die-hard Maoist Enver Hoxha. My stories of French students who took themselves for revolutionaries must have seemed insignificant when compared with the elevated activities of a true "cultural *revolution*" of Albania. But my spirits were raised when, the next day, I visited the Hornsey College of Art and Technology, which had been occupied that week by its students. Although their demands had a strong corporatist ring, their determined resistance to compromise transformed the implications of their revolt. What had begun as a demand for specific benefits became another movement of resistance to the "system" itself. Although they did not read French, they could just as well have written their own version of the Nanterre students' question: "Pourquoi les sociologues?"

I had to wonder whether I had taken my wishes for reality. Was Hornsey truly the spread to England of the spirit of resistance that had

shaken France and visited America as well? However that may be, on my return from London I wrote a short essay for *Esprit*, optimistically entitled “Un début en Angleterre.” Would the spirit take even on that dank British soil? If so, it might spread elsewhere.

Replete with hope, I followed the path of the revolution, from Switzerland to Italy, then from Prague to Berlin and Frankfurt. But on my return to the United States in August, my optimism was dealt a double blow. The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia put an end to the “Prague Spring,” and the higher-ups of the Democratic Party gave the presidential nomination to Vice President Hubert Humphrey, despite (or because of) the protesters who became violent when they realized that the delegates to the convention did not take their movement seriously. The streets of Chicago became the scene of police riots under the pretense of containing protesters. The Democratic Party found itself in tatters, and the war in Vietnam would continue for six long years, marked by still more pointless losses of life. Were these two defeats the definitive judgment of History on 1968? Before I try to answer that question, a short description of my travel to the lands of the European New Left, and in particular to Prague, will be useful.

My trip was not the revolutionary travel undertaken by a “comrade” carrying directives from above. It was friends of friends, who found a place for us, often on a couch or less, and explained local politics and their own ways of resisting the hold of the “system.” This Left was not an organized Left, certainly not a new International. It was simply a matter of sharing experiences and broadening horizons. But the experience was so similar that a *de facto* International existed. The dogmatism of the sects and that of the theorists had no place during that summer; language had been freed, and thought as well. This candor, which would later be criticized as naïveté, would disappear in the coming militant years just because—it seems to me—the wave of hope had receded, and the only faith that was left held on to dogma for dear life, or mere life rather than the “good life” that since Aristotle has been the concern of political action.

Marxism remained, as Sartre put it in *The Critique of Dialectical Reason*, “the unsurpassable horizon of our times.” But only a horizon. Still, I was intent upon visiting Zurich, where Lenin had spent the war before the armored boxcar brought him back to the Finland Station. We were put up in an extraordinary place, the Pinkus Buchhandlung,

a dignified secondhand bookshop, in which aged comrades from many countries, who had found refuge in Switzerland, donated or sold the books and pamphlets they had collected during their years as militants. Imagine what an ambience this was for a young American who wanted to come into contact with revolutionary thought! By contrast, the protests around Kaufhaus in the center of town, which activists wanted to turn into a youth center, reflected more my own recent experience. When I visited Zurich many years later, acquaintances vaguely remembered Pinkus, but could tell me nothing about the Kaufhaus demonstrations, which had disappeared from the collective memory.

I do not remember much about Italy, other than the summer heat and the abundance of small radical newspapers where friends worked. It seems to me that the hold of the Communist Party remained quite strong, no doubt because of the newly reprinted works of Gramsci, who could be appropriated by both the party and a newer Left. In any case, the hegemony of Italian communism was supported by a strong dose of anti-fascism, which was no doubt why we all sang *Bandiera Rosa* rather than the *Internationale*. Was this the opening that led to the deadly *ouvrierisme* of the Red Brigades in the years that followed? It was as if the rationalist tradition of international communism prevented the blind excesses that would follow.

How did we get from Italy to Prague? I do not remember the route. But it is what I learned there that has been most important to me. The so-called “Prague Spring,” which was for many a sign that communism *could* be reformed, preserving its material benefits while adding political rights, was marked by a constant radicalization, for example the petition “Two Thousand Words.” The lesson that I took from this was that communism simply could not be reformed—a lesson that seemed certain even before Moscow invoked the “Brezhnev doctrine” to justify its violent intervention.

Why was I so sensitive to the Czech events? I had already been to Prague during the summer of 1967, after an international gathering in Hungary organized by the Quakers, who had invited two young leaders from Eastern and Western bloc countries to meet. With some others, I had proposed a resolution condemning the American war in Vietnam. The only person who refused to sign it was one of the Czechs. She did not refuse because she was in favor of the war, but because she was fed up with signing petitions (anticipating Havel’s

“greengrocer” some years later). Although she was finally persuaded, her resistance to the ritual demands of political correctness foreshadowed a future when the emergence of an autonomous civil society would destabilize the Soviet Empire.

Leaving Budapest, which still bore traces of the Soviet invasion of 1956, I went to Prague, where the circle of Czech acquaintances widened. It so happened that the mother of Jan Kavan, one of the leaders of the student movement, was English, which facilitated communication. But what struck me in the circle of student leaders—so much like the many that I had met on this trip, and knew in the States—was the fact that the miscellany of languages in which we tried to communicate only mildly prevented our discussion—around pitchers of beer or during long evening walks in the Hradcarny castle-garden that overlooks the city.

What was there to discuss? In 1967 I was still reading *Capital* in the dormitory of Nanterre; they preferred Dostoevsky, and were developing their own great literature. But as with the changed tone of the Nanterre radicals that I felt in April, there was a shared spirit that made communication possible and rewarding. I was not willing to give up on “the” revolution in 1967; but when we met a year later, in 1968, I had become what one might call a premature member of the “anti-totalitarian” Left. But that story belongs to my future; it is also the story of the anti-totalitarian Left in France, and particularly the work of Claude Lefort and Cornelius Castoriadis, whom I was shortly to meet.

The trip was not over; driving through Germany on the return to France, I again experienced the contradiction I had sought to overcome by leaving for France: Marxism or militancy, revolution or resistance? In the United States, the New Left was identified with an organization called Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). In Germany, our friends also participated in an “SDS,” but the acronym stood for *Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund*. With us, democracy was primary; with them, socialism had priority. When I had left for France, I was one of them. Now I was no longer so sure.

What was unclear to me was the West German New Leftists’ relationship to their “socialist” cousins in the GDR. Of all the militants of the new student Left that I met that summer, the West Germans were the most erudite and the most deeply immersed in the writings of Marx—possibly because his language was their own, permitting

them to glory in the intricacies of a theory closed to those who knew it only through translations. But one can wonder whether their theoretical erudition blinded them to the political realities. For some reason they asked us to hide in our car tracts against the Vietnam War that we would transmit to their friends in Frankfurt. Why hide them? Didn't the GDR also oppose the war? I did not understand. Ironically, it was not the pamphlets that ended up alarming the East German border guards; it was my copy of Lukacs's *History and Class Consciousness*, which I had naïvely left in view, that led the border guards to open the trunk, pull up the back seat, and rifle through all the suitcases. Having just left Prague, this should have been no surprise; orthodox Marxism takes criticism badly. On the other hand, the pamphlets caused no problem. Why had the Berliners worried about them? I never found out.

I will end this account with a final anecdote that returns to the lessons drawn from my French experience. In the fall of 1968 I was back in Texas, writing my dissertation (which, consistent with my own changing perceptions, sought to understand how and why the young Marx moved from philosophy to political economy). I was introduced to a French writer, Pierre Gascar, who was a visiting professor for the semester. He proposed that I organize a discussion to be broadcast on the public radio station France Culture. I called on Greg Calvert, a former president of SDS, who spoke good French. As I recall it, the nub of our discussion centered on a phrase often heard in France during May '68: "You make the revolution for yourself." Hearing the slogan now, it is tempting to join the critics who see 1968 as merely the prelude to the creation of the egoistic, hedonistic neoliberal society that would gradually emerge. However, the travels that I have recounted here suggest another interpretation, which I had not wholly grasped at the time, but which Calvert understood quite well. The time for a "revolution" founded on a rationalist and materialist philosophy of history was over. No longer would individual freedom be a mere means to the realization of a preordained future; the idea of the proletariat as a "universal" class, or that of the colonized as its Third World stand-in, was finished. In its place came a movement of individuals resisting all heteronomy, searching for autonomy, and creating democracy. One could no longer say to women, or to homosexuals, or to ethnic, religious, and racial minorities, that their immediate interests must be

sacrificed for the sake of “the” revolution which would ultimately put an end to all their merely personal and otherwise egoistic miseries. The nature of politics was changing.

What was the new politics that I encountered in Paris and Prague? At the start of my travels, I was a critic of liberalism; but the only alternative seemed to be some sort of socialism. By the end of those travels, it was democracy that appeared on the agenda—as it had been on the agenda of the American New Leftists who named their organization “Students for a Democratic Society.” But my understanding of democracy had deepened as a result of these experiences—although it would take time, and more experience, to realize what was still at best intuitive and inchoate at the time. What had seemed to me to be the “progress” of the French revolutionaries from 1789 to 1793 (and to 1917) was in fact that attempt to create what I now call a “democratic republic” in which politics and society are identical. As opposed to that vision, the democracy that would realize the experience of 1968 would be a “republican democracy” in which political institutions are structured in a manner that assures the freedom and autonomy of the individual members of what has come to be called civil society. What that republican democracy would look like more concretely has to remain the subject for another discussion.

JEFFREY C. ISAAC

*Rethinking the Political Scientifically*¹

Brief Reflections on 1968 by a Child of the Seventies

An emblematic moment of recent history, 1968 symbolizes both the apotheosis and the implosion of the sixties, which centered on the emergence of the New Left, and the themes of participatory democracy, “democracy in the street,” the youth rebellion, new social movements, new forms of liberation, and challenges to alienating structures associated with post-industrialism and modernity. The themes of authenticity, justice, and participatory democracy were pervasive. Perhaps most importantly, this New Left was powered by new forms of the politicization of universities and campuses as sites of democracy and freedom. This was true in the West and even in the Eastern bloc, though the experiences differed profoundly (a point made brilliantly by Paul Berman in his book *A Tale of Two Utopias*²). Indeed, from Berkeley to Prague, and from Mexico City to Paris, 1968 represented a spirit of revolt and an experimentation with new forms and sites of radical politics—in the words of James Miller, “democracy in the streets.”³ Accompanying these was a powerful mystique of rebellion and revolution that has continued to color the reputations, the recollections, and the thinking of diverse participants of that time. The public intellectual life of the contemporary world is unthinkable outside of the orbit of the experiences and ideas of the sixties and the careers of men and women who experienced the sixties firsthand and who went on to write and

¹ This piece is dedicated to Ray Franklin and Peter Manicas, inspiring teachers, mentors, public intellectuals, and friends.

² Paul Berman, *A Tale of Two Utopias: The Political Journey of the Generation of 1968* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996).

³ James Miller, *Democracy Is in the Streets: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987).

speak about and reconsider these experiences, whether to reclaim them or to repudiate them.

Contemporary political theory can be viewed as an effort to reappropriate the sixties, whether to bury or to praise its legacies. This is true across the political spectrum, from the so-called New Right to neoconservatives to political liberals of the Rawlsian variety to members of the so-called “democratic Left” (represented by magazines such as *Dissent*, *Reset*, and *Constellations*) to radicals who draw unequivocally from the most radical tendencies of 1968. A discussion of the meanings and legacies of 1968 is thus invariably a discussion of some of the most fertile, controversial, and exciting tendencies of contemporary political theory, whether in the writings of Havel, Lefort, Badiou, Bourdieu, Habermas, Michnik, Cohn-Bendit, Glucksmann, Levy, or Walzer.

I am an intellectual, scholar, and professional political scientist, a child of the seventies, who came of age as the sixties were passing into history. I entered the university in the mid-1970s and was part of the first generation to be taught by a professoriate shaped by the experiences of the previous decade. I experienced 1968 intellectually at one step removed. It was central to my intellectual formation, because it was central to the institutions in which I was educated, to the books and essays that drew my attention and to the academic intellectuals who inspired and taught me. But I did not experience these developments directly as political experiences. This narrative, of a post-New Left intellectual/academic, who has flourished as what Russell Jacoby referred to as a “last intellectual” (actually, I think in Jacoby’s terms, my cohort and I are probably better described as “*post-intellectuals*”),⁴ while prosaic and lacking in romance or heroism, is one important legacy of the sixties worthy of some reflection. I think this narrative sheds some light on the current fate of “reason” in the world and on the spaces most hospitable to it. But at the very least, it is *my* narrative, and is thus worthy of reflection to *me*. And since what I think is at least of interest to the organizers of this symposium—who asked me to speak—I will comment upon it. Perhaps, indeed, this meta-comment itself can be taken as a preview of what is to follow, because one of my points is that while my “heroes” of the sixties could speak as if

⁴ Russell Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe* (New York: Basic Books, 1987).

they represented something Big, for academic intellectuals such as myself, such a posture seems like a profound gesture of *bad faith*—however many of my colleagues seem drawn to such gestures. This should not and does not inhibit me from speaking. But it does cause me constantly and insistently to pause, and qualify, and invite response—since while I take quite seriously what I have to say, I take equally seriously the fact that it is (merely?) I for whom I speak, and not for History or Truth or Science or Justice, and there are others out there with their own views on these, and other, things. But I digress. . .

This narrative of mine, in brief, consists of four moments: a) the experience of growing up in New York City in the 1960s, as a fairly typical middle-class boy in Queens; momentous events and processes swirled all around me, and touched me, but I was only dimly aware of their presence, much less their significance; in this I was a fairly normal young American; b) the experience of attending Queens College in the mid-1970s, and being drawn to an already politically chastened, and intellectually reflexive, version of neo-Marxism/democratic socialism/critical theory/radical social theory; this was an experience of a kind of public intellectualism that profoundly shaped my basic dispositions and thinking, a heady, urbane, serious, and sharp milieu of political theorizing that was most definitely engaged and radical but also most definitely scholarly and incorporated within the sphere of the university; c) the experience of maturing as a scholar and teacher who became an academic professional who, shaped by his reflexive experiences of New Left theorizing and its limits, became fascinated by and drawn to the experiences of revolt in Eastern Europe that culminated in the revolutions of 1989 and their legacies; and, finally (?) d) the experience of developing a sense of “ethical responsibility” in the Weberian sense for the university, the academic department, and the profession in which my inquiries were developed and from which my proverbial keep was earned, and of seeking out and assuming positions of leadership and stewardship of these institutions. For me to think seriously now about what I am doing, and to reflect on my relationship to the sixties and rebellion and political modernity, I must own, as it were, not simply the fact that I have found myself in the university—the way I experienced things as a young teacher in New York—but that I have chosen to *make* myself in the university, and to consider it my professional and intellectual home.

I am, in short, a university-based, academic *political scientist* of the “post-behavioral” era. While I have experienced some success and satisfaction contributing to “public intellectual” journals of opinion, most of my writing has been published in professional venues, and most of my work is done on campuses, in connection with contributing to academic scholarship and helping to train the next generation of political scientists. As such, I have come to draw certain lessons from 1968, among which the following stand out:

a) Universities are very much part of the world, for good and ill. And as a conscientious inhabitant of the world-within-the-world that is the university, it is impossible for me to avoid or to evade challenging problems associated with the political character and consequences of different forms of knowledge and knowledge-production; the fragility of academic freedom; the political-economic pressures transforming higher education; and the dangers—to the life of the mind, to the liberal arts, to intellectual freedom, and to democratic participation—associated with the decline of literacy and the new forms of speed, digitalization, and communication that pose fundamental challenges to the notion of “reason” and “the public sphere”;

b) Universities also enjoy a perhaps unique “relative autonomy” in this world, which is also the source of their value as spaces of freedom of inquiry and experimentation in a world in which certain forms of private freedom and experimentation are furiously promoted, but serious inquiry and experimentation are in short supply. This relative autonomy is often given short shrift, and endangered, by critics of the university, on the right and left, who seek to reduce its purposes to economic imperatives or political causes (to be clear: I do not doubt that the university does have such purposes; but it has other purposes as well, and more importantly, within its boundaries there are many different kinds of scholars, teachers, and students, with their own forms of purposiveness);

c) Scholarly discourses and academic disciplines, housed largely in universities, play a crucial role in cultivating intellectual skills, conveying information and knowledge, and nourishing critical dispositions that are central to a free and democratic society. Participating in shaping these discourses and disciplines is thus not simply a professional nor

even a merely intellectual activity; it is a deeply ethical one; and while it does not necessarily or immediately translate into political practice, it helps to shape our world and the ideas that govern our world;

d) The kind of political science that I practice and seek to promote—through my writing, teaching, editing, and academic leadership—is an intellectually open and publicly engaged political science that is shaped and inspired by the best lessons of the sixties as I understand them, and has been made possible by the initiatives of the generation that preceded me into the academy—the generation of the sixties. New developments in critical theory (including “multiculturalism and the politics of difference” and “postmodernism”), “American political development,” “historical institutionalism,” “constructivism,” “civic education,” and even versions of the “new institutionalism” can be seen as products of a post-behavioral turn in political science shaped by the New Left. The intellectual history of these developments fascinates me, and it is an important part of the story whereby forms of intellectual rebellion migrated into the academic disciplines and contributed to many new forms of openness. This is a very complicated story, with different dynamics in the humanities and the social sciences, and indeed within each discipline. The baneful consequences of a certain “political correctness”—and of the attacks on so-called “tenured radicals” that emerged as a backlash against the new academic identity politics—have been widely discussed. These tendencies exist in every discipline. But as I read the present as history within my own discipline, I find plausible a different, at least complementary, story of how New Left-inspired forms of Marxist and radical political economy, sociology, and political science adapted to and in turn reshaped the social sciences, opening them up to broader and more critical impulses;

e) At the same time that it originated in large part in the New Left, the political science that I have in mind here is probably best understood as an academic version of “political liberalism,” in the sense that it understands itself to be party to a broader set of academic discourses housed in a complex university structure that is itself part of a much more complex set of social institutions, and does not see itself as possessing any special revolutionary significance or heroic aura; and in

the sense that is, speaking broadly, an effort to reappropriate what Ira Katznelson has called a “political studies enlightenment” in his important essay *Desolation and Enlightenment*.⁵ In short, it is a problem-centered political science that asks big questions about institutions and their development and their consequences and legitimations, and that is energized by a commitment to core liberal democratic values associated with political pluralism and democratic inclusivity.

f) University-based political science is not a form of moral or civic virtue, and it suffers from all of the pathologies of modern bureaucratic life, including narcissistic forms of expertise and the routinization of intellectual energy; but it is also a “republic of letters” linked to other such “republics,” in a transnational civil society that is a source of critical perspectives, useful knowledge, intellectual solidarity and hospitality, and intellectual freedom, all in short supply in our world. In this regard, these “republics” can be regarded as “oases in the desert” in the sense developed by Hannah Arendt in the concluding sections of her classic *On Revolution*—a book, first published in 1963, that is reputed to have had an impact on the activists of 1968. Such oases offer refuge, but also serve as potential sources of irrigation, and nourishment, for the diverse individuals who inhabit them and travel between them, and for the society at large.

The intellectual story I have tried to outline above is prosaic and perhaps even banal. But perhaps it is not so discrepant from more recognizable impulses of 1968, and tales of its utopias and their complicated and sobering fates. There are no doubt other narratives, derived from other experiences. This one is simply mine, though I suspect it is not that far removed from those of many others who have grown up in the post-New Left system of university-based intellectual life.

And so I conclude, somewhat abruptly, with two observations.

The first, echoing Adam Michnik, a friend to many participants in this symposium, is simple: “Gray is often beautiful, in politics and even

⁵ Ira Katznelson, *Desolation and Enlightenment: Political Knowledge After Total War, Totalitarianism, and the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

in political theory.”⁶ It may well be that there are different shades of gray, and that they are the results of complicated blends of bolder and more riveting colors. A world without these colors would be dull and stagnant. But if we have learned anything in the wake of the failures of twentieth-century utopias, it is that a world defined by bold and bright colors may be bracing, but it is also exhausting, and more than a little over-stimulating. Gray has its limits, but also its virtues.

The second draws equally simply from C. Wright Mills, a hero and inspiration for the New Left, who reminded us that the critical study of society, nourished and practiced within the liberal—or perhaps post-liberal?—university, can be a modest source of hope in an otherwise demoralizing, if not desolate, world. As Mills wrote in his classic *The Sociological Imagination*, what modern individuals need is “a quality of mind that will help them to use information and to develop reason in order to achieve lucid summations of what is going on in the world and of what may be happening within themselves... by such means the personal uneasiness of individuals is focused upon explicit troubles and the indifference of publics is transformed into involvement with public issues.”⁷ I quoted this text in a Queens College graduation speech given in 1979. Mills’s book was assigned to me by an inspirational teacher of philosophy and mentor named Peter Manicas, a man of the New Left,⁸ who had a huge impact on my thinking and on my decision to go to graduate school, a decision that led me, among many places, to right here and now. A lot has changed since that time, in my own sense of self as an “intellectual” and, more importantly, in the world. And yet, writing thirty years later, these words still ring true. This is one meaning, perhaps, of 1968, of the intellectual and political openings it symbolized—and of the promise of critical intellectual inquiry in a thoroughly disenchanted, and post-post-historical, world.

⁶ Adam Michnik, “Gray is Beautiful: A Letter to Ira Katznelson,” in *Letters from Freedom* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 322.

⁷ C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*, with a new afterword by Todd Gitlin (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 5.

⁸ Manicas’s best-known book was a sharp anarchistic essay entitled *The Death of the State* (New York: Putnam, 1974).

JAN-WERNER MÜLLER

*What Did They Think
They Were Doing?*

The Political Thought of (the West European)
1968 Revisited¹

Nineteen sixty-eight was a year of mass violence: the Vietnam War, the crushing of student protest in Mexico, the Cultural Revolution in China—and, in East-Central Europe, the suppression of the “Polish March” and the Prague Spring. By comparison, little seemed at stake in Western Europe—which nevertheless produced most of the iconic images of ’68. As was often pointed out, west of Czechoslovakia “no one died”; no government fell. Not surprisingly, then, for a number of not even especially conservative observers, ’68—and the sixties, more broadly—seemed to have been about a small minority of spoiled children playing revolution. Raymond Aron was to heap scorn on what he perceived as a mere “psychodrama” (an interpretation eventually endorsed by a communist like Eric Hobsbawm); Ernest Gellner diagnosed the “mad logic of a family quarrel”; and even some of the protagonists thought they were just engaged in a huge “costume drama.”²

So many myths or—put more neutrally—collective memories were to surround the various “events” of the sixties that it is hard to get a real sense not just of what happened, but also what the intentions of

¹ This essay draws on and extends my work in “1968 as Event, Milieu and Ideology,” in *Journal of Political Ideologies* 7, no. 1 (2002); *A Dangerous Mind: Carl Schmitt in Post-War European Thought* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003); “The Paradoxes of Post-War Italian Political Thought,” in *History of European Ideas*, special issue on European social and political thought after 1945, ed. Edmund Neill (forthcoming); and my book on twentieth-century European political thought (forthcoming). I am grateful to Dick Howard for reactions to some of the arguments presented here.

² Thomas Hecken, *1968: Von Texten und Theorien aus einer Zeit euphorischer Kritik* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2008), 135–148.

the political actors might have been. Grand narratives and ambitious macro-explanations of causes and effects abound to this day. Some observers came to see it as the birth of a kind of libertarianism in Europe, or at least a *déblocage* of society (André Glucksmann), or a laboratory for post-industrial society (Claus Leggewie). Others lamented it as a return of political romanticism, or perhaps a return of anarchism, or perhaps even a return of fascism—or maybe a kind of religious revival.

Interpretations revolving around unintended consequences have had a particular appeal. It has often been claimed that '68 had largely positive effects, but effects very much contrary to what student leaders thought they were aiming at: no political revolution broke out, but the “insurrection in middle-class customs”³ succeeded and culture became more liberalized; the specific objectives of protest hardly ever were realized, but dissent and even civil disobedience became more accepted as part of normal democratic politics—Jürgen Habermas was to speak of a “fundamental liberalization” of West Germany. Many of the protagonists are of course comfortable with this narrative: Daniel Cohn-Bendit, the Franco-German student leader often dubbed “Red Danny” (today a self-declared member of the “libéraux-libertaires”), could exclaim: “When one watches footage of '68 today, listens to the speeches, it's a catastrophe. It really hurts.” But at the same time, Cohn-Bendit and his comrades would always insist that '68 had started a fundamental process of democratization, political modernization, and even Americanization—the cunning of reason seemed to have ensured that anti-Americanism, which at the time appeared as a distinctive feature of the Western European '68, turned out to be the supreme means of promoting Americanization.⁴ In short, retrospective dissociation by the participants could go hand in hand with the claim that history had worked behind the backs of the actors, so to speak.

Conservatives, meanwhile, would not simply see '68, with André Malraux, as a “crisis of civilization”; they maintain that the '68ers had a basic contempt for democratic institutions, because they were averse

³ Paul Berman, *A Tale of Two Utopias: The Political Journey of the Generation of 1968* (New York: Norton, 1996), 8.

⁴ Or, for that matter, Europeanization. According to Glucksmann *père et fils*, “Nous sommes tous des Juifs allemands” was actually a call for transnational European solidarity. See André and Raphael Glucksmann, *Mai 68 expliqué à Nicolas Sarkozy* (Paris: Denoël, 2008), 37–38.

to any institutions as institutions—that is, authority *per se*—and that this had inflicted long-term damage on the political cultures of countries like France and Germany.⁵ In the most extreme version of this argument, '68 led directly to the terrorism of the 1970s: the Red Army Faction in the Federal Republic and the Red Brigades in Italy. Less dramatic, but still rather striking, was Nicolas Sarkozy's claim during the 2007 presidential election campaign that '68 was, among other things, responsible for relativism, cynicism, "finance capitalism" and golden parachutes for CEOs...

Contours of '68 Political Thought

Understanding the political thought of '68 is not obviously the best way into understanding the actions of students (and, where applicable, workers) as whole. And yet the participants themselves clearly held to the belief that their actions were inseparable from political theory: they were driven by theory, but, so they thought, their practical experiences would, in turn, drive theory further. Yet, theory could only loom so large because of the particular cultural-political background students were facing—and reacting against: the liberal, self-consciously "post-ideological" and "de-radicalized" consensus politics of the 1950s and 1960s—which froze out the more radical Left and led, in extreme cases, to an outright ban on Communist parties, for instance in Germany. The emphasis on technocratic planning, productivity, the importance of finding fulfillment in the private sphere, and the declaration of stability as the ultimate meaning of politics had reinforced a sense of political suffocation. Theorizing *as such* already seemed a highly political gesture against consensus politics.

However, it would be wrong to think that student protest had only been rooted in some form of *Kulturpessimismus* concerning the new postwar consumer capitalism. Arguably, the most concrete factor that motivated protest was the Vietnam War and, more broadly, a sense of

⁵ There certainly were theoretical-anthropological underpinnings for a principled anti-statism and a wholly new take on institutionalized power: crucial in the French context was Pierre Clastres, *La société contre l'État: Recherches d'anthropologie politique* (Paris: Éditions de minuit, 1974).

Western hypocrisy vis-à-vis the Third World. Many French leftists had first been radicalized by the experience of the Algerian War, while the German protest movement really took off in the context of the Shah of Iran's visit to Berlin in June 1967—for many a symbol of a brutal and corrupt dictatorship not just condoned, but actively supported, by the West. Not all students knew what they were for, but almost all knew what they were against: according to German student leader Rudi Dutschke, for instance, '68 was not about "abstract theory" but "existential disgust."⁶ The flipside of this existential disgust and anger about Western hypocrisy, however, turned out to be an idealization of Third World liberation struggles, and the mystique of the guerrilla leader (a frequent slogan ran: "War no, guerrilla action yes").

To be sure, the sound of the sixties was also heavily philosophical: Marx exegesis by highly idiosyncratic and difficult thinkers like Louis Althusser in Paris, the rediscovery of the writings of the Frankfurt School, and the conscious turn of British left-wing thinkers such as Perry Anderson and others associated with the recently founded *New Left Review* to continental theory (and away from allegedly superficial British empiricism).⁷ And yet, despite all the theoretical work—and not least the tortured theorizing of the relationship between theory and praxis—there remained a sense that everyone simply had to be learning by doing, or, put even more simply: making it up as one went along. It was no accident, for instance, that "en route" became a favorite phrase among French student leaders. Cohn-Bendit spoke of "learning through action," Dutschke talked about a "unity of action and reflection," while the Iranian intellectual Bahman Nirumand, who joined the students in Berlin, advocated "enlightenment through action." All these precepts appeared to be not much more than restatements of "learning by doing." And almost all radicals ultimately appeared to put their trust in events themselves somehow to "practically problematize"—as one of the most telling phrases went—the elements of theory that seemed doubtful or confused.⁸

⁶ Dutschke, quoted by Gérard Sandoz, "Etre Revolutionnaire," in Rudi Dutschke, *Ecristes Politiques (1967–1968)* (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1968), 31.

⁷ On Anderson's trajectory, see Gregory Elliott, *Perry Anderson: The Merciless Laboratory of History* (University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

⁸ All of which gives an ironic retrospective meaning to the (at the time ironic) French May '68 slogan "Assez d'actes, des paroles!"

So '68 political theory very much has to be considered "thought in motion."⁹ But having made that point, I want to insist in this essay that the political thought of '68 had a number of common features in Western Europe (mainly France, Germany, and Italy) which are only partly explained by the common challenges and causes conventionally adduced: the stifling postwar consensus politics in general, and the crisis in higher education and the Vietnam War in particular. Above all, the fact that the student leaders (and workers' leaders, to the extent that workers joined the students) spoke a language of revolution (though often interestingly hedged: the leaders of the March 22 movement in France, for instance, talked about a "noncatastrophic revolution"). This would have been an absolutely banal observation at the time, but the tendency to confuse effects with intentions on the part of observers and analysts of '68 has led to a widespread perception that the '68ers were really "reformers" or "liberalizers." They were not, and even the "long march through the institutions" which Dutschke famously advocated was not a kind of "reform from within." Rather, as Dutschke said quite openly, "the long march through the institutions is the subversive use of the contradictions and possibilities within and outside the political-social apparatus, so as to destroy this apparatus in a long process."¹⁰ In any event, "liberalization" might well have happened even without '68, just as much as the softening of the distinction between high and popular culture which has been another major feature of the post-sixties Western world. And the '68ers themselves—following Marcuse's concern about "repressive desublimation"—were precisely *against* "liberalization" within unchanged capitalist social structures.

Having said that, revolution was meant above all as a revolution (or at least a radical change) of consciousness. In almost all theorists' and leaders' accounts, revolution had to be initiated by a minority who, through provocation, direct action, and so on, demonstrated to majorities the sham nature of merely "formal democracy," the pathologies of

⁹ Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey, 1968: *Eine Zeitreise* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2008).

¹⁰ See also Riccardo Bavaj, "Die 68er-Bewegung: Ursprünge und Grundzüge des politischen Denkens der antiautoritären Führungsspitze um Rudi Dutschke," in Riccardo Bavaj and Florentine Fritzen, eds., *Deutschland—ein Land ohne revolutionäre Traditionen?* (Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang, 2005), 121–135.

capitalism, the structures of oppression and alienation, and the like. There were long-lasting and acrimonious disputes about who the revolutionary subject was (students, the unemployed, pupils, other marginalized groups)—what eventually came to be derided as “shopping for the revolutionary subject.” Moreover, attempts to find inspiration among thinkers who had shaped Marxist debates in the interwar period (Bloch, Lukács, to some degree Horkheimer and Adorno¹¹) remained largely fruitless (and were sometimes rebuffed by these thinkers themselves¹²).

For most of the leaders (certainly up until about 1970), this revolution in consciousness was *not* to be brought about with violence.¹³ “Guerrilla” at the beginning only meant “Verweigerungs- und Sabotage-Guerilla,” as Dutschke put it (refusal and sabotage guerrilla); and Jürgen Habermas, who had still charged student leaders with “left-wing fascism” and “toying with terror” in 1967, eventually lauded the democratizing potential of consciously breaking the rules (this discovery of the democratic value of civil disobedience was obviously not so much news in the United States). The real move towards violence and all-out criminality was actually a sign of desperation, of the failure of what can meaningfully be called ’68. An aggressive and authoritarian “proletarianism” came to dominate among those still intent on political confron-

¹¹ One need only remember the terrible 1969 flyer: “Adorno als Institution ist tot.”

¹² Witness Lukács claiming: “We all went wrong, and today it would be quite mistaken to try to revive the works of those times as if they were valid now. In the West, there is a tendency to erect them into ‘classics of heresy’, but we have no need for that today. The twenties are a past epoch; it is the philosophical problems of the sixties that should concern us.” Georg Lukács, *Record of a Life: An Autobiographical Sketch*, ed. I. Eörsi (Verso, 1983), 173. For Dutschke’s extensive engagement with Lukács, see his *Versuch, Lenin auf die Füße zu stellen: Über den halbasiatischen und westeuropäischen Weg zum Sozialismus. Lenin, Lukács und die Dritte Internationale* (Berlin: Wagenbach, 1974). Bloch’s reaction was much more positive; see, for instance, the record of and commentary on the Bloch-Dutschke encounter at Bad Boll in Helmut Geiger and Armin Roether, eds., *Dutschke und Bloch: Zivilgesellschaft damals und heute* (Thalheimer, 1999), and Arno Münster, *Ernst Bloch: Eine politische Biographie* (Berlin: Philo, 2001), 345–358.

¹³ Indicative is one of Dutschke’s central statements: “Die Revolution, die wir wollen, ist die Revolution, die die Selbsttätigkeit der Massen in allen Bereichen des gesellschaftlichen Lebens weckt und erst dann die Veränderung in der Gesellschaft durchführt, wenn die Mehrheiten bereit sind, die Veränderung zu tragen.”

tation; alternatively, there was the retreat into “liberated zones,” communes, and so on (which is not to say that this retreat was conceived of as apolitical or privatistic).¹⁴ And of course, there was terrorism.

Many theorists and leaders shared a perception of what they were up against: “formal democracy,” or, as Rudi Dutschke put it at one point, “unreasonable democracy”; an “authoritarian welfare state” and “repressive tolerance,” in Marcuse’s seminal formulations; the pseudo-pluralist “harmony of repression” (Dutschke), a seemingly invincible apparatus created by the fusion of economy and politics in the form of “integral etatism” (Dutschke and Hans-Jürgen Krahl),¹⁵ and, in what is arguably the most important lasting theoretical contribution to ’68 thought and to postwar Marxist theory in general: Guy Débord’s conception of the “society of the spectacle.”

So what remained constant throughout was a negation, rather than a positive program. Symptomatic is Alain Geismar’s 1968 statement: “I am not a theoretician. For me, socialism can be defined negatively, with respect to existing structures, by a rejection of all bureaucracy, of all centralized direction...”¹⁶ What Geismar and others opposed, more specifically, was delegation of power—which in fact had been one of the central elements of post-1945 Western European consensus politics; instead, they wanted political subjects—whether individual or collective—to retain as much power as possible and freely exercise their political will: a kind of voluntarism, in contrast with the highly constrained post-war consensus politics.¹⁷

¹⁴ The standard objection to the latter was of course that the “totality” of capitalist society would not allow for “ghettos of freedom” (Gaston Salvatore).

¹⁵ Wolfgang Kraushaar, “Autoritärer Staat und Antiautoritäre Bewegung: Zum Organisationsreferat von Rudi Dutschke und Hans-Jürgen Krahl auf der 22. Delegiertenkonferenz des SDS in Frankfurt (4.–8. Sept. 1967),” in Wolfgang Kraushaar, ed., *Frankfurter Schule und Studentenbewegung: Von der Flaschenpost zum Molotowcocktail 1946–1995*, vol. 3 (Hamburg: Rogner and Bernhard, 1998), 15–33.

¹⁶ Hervé Bourges, ed., *The French Student Revolt: The Leaders Speak*, trans. B. R. Brewster (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968), 43.

¹⁷ Most clearly argued in: Peter Lindseth, ‘The Paradox of Parliamentary Supremacy: Delegation, Democracy, and Dictatorship in Germany and France, 1920–1950s’, in: *Yale Law Journal* (2004), 1341–1415. As for voluntarism, witness for instance Dutschke saying: ‘Wir haben eine historisch offene Möglichkeit. Es hängt primär von unserem Willen ab, wie diese Periode der Geschichte enden wird.’

At the same time, it is surprising that many theorists' descriptions of what had gone wrong with democracy and liberal institutions like parliaments relied on naïve ideals and implausible historical accounts of what *liberalism* had been like in nineteenth-century Europe. Contrasting institutions as they actually functioned under conditions of mid-twentieth-century industrial mass democracy with an imaginary golden age was a typical theoretical move—one that showed affinities with Carl Schmitt's antiparlamentarianism from the 1920s as well as various "elite theories" such as Mosca's and Pareto's.

Also actually quite liberal in certain ways was what can be called the master concept of '68 political thought: autonomy (in contrast to both oppression/constraint and alienation—and "technocracy" as a concrete embodiment thereof). What was *not* liberal in any historical sense of the word were the institutions which students and workers proposed to bring about autonomy: "direct democracy," "direct action in factory and street," and, somewhat more specifically, self-management as realized in workers' councils, students' councils, peasants' councils, and other means to end what was called "industrial and administrative monarchy."¹⁸ Many of these institutions were in fact quite "Old Left," derived from long-standing socialist, syndicalist, or anarchist traditions going back at least to the Paris Commune.¹⁹ As many observers noted, the political language of '68, as far as positive prescription was concerned, seemed sometimes strangely archaic, almost like a last hurrah for a nineteenth-century Left.

Symptomatic here is Guy Débord, whose highly original theorizing about the "society of the spectacle" ended with the practical call for—of all things—workers' councils.

Yet, the political failure of '68 is explained not so much by the supposedly utopian nature of proposals such as self-management as by the complete absence (with the partial exception of Italy) of a social basis for the movement. The search for what C. Wright Mills called "historical agencies of structural change" and the endless debates about the famous "question of organization" (*Organisationsfrage*) were symptoms of this problem; especially the latter never came even close to any kind of answer (although up until about 1970 there appeared to be a consensus

¹⁸ Gilcher-Holtey, 1968, 83.

¹⁹ On this point, see also Hecken, 1968.

against “vanguardism”).²⁰ In other words, the search for a political subject or a radical mode of political action failed to yield any conclusive results in theory or practice. Almost as a default option, then, emerged the thought that political action itself—not any particular set of political institutions—was the prime way to end alienation. Alternatively, Maoism developed an in retrospect almost incomprehensible appeal; in one sense, though, the reason was simple: it answered the *Organisationsfrage* and seemed to promise a genuine student-worker alliance.²¹ The same was true of the idealization of guerrilla warfare: it suggested the right actors and the right mode of action (even if Western Europe happened to be the wrong corner of the world). And finally, for those unable to define their role and social base in the present, there remained the escape into the past, with the promise of complete moral clarity: the phenomenon of the *retro-résistants*, both in Germany and Italy.

I will try to make good on these large and stylized claims by taking a closer look at the work of Johannes Agnoli (the prime critic of parliamentarianism on the German scene), the theories of Herbert Marcuse (*the* international mentor of the student movements, although much more so in the United States and Germany than in France or Italy²²), and the bodies of thought centered on autonomy in the Italian '68 and post-'68 context. Finally, I want to say a few words about Guy Debord and the Situationists—who were hardly perceived as central to '68 at the time, but whose theoretical contribution was much more long-lasting than that of many other thinkers around '68, and which also provides a more plausible account of what happened with '68 after '68.

The Transformation of Parliamentary Democracy

One reason that liberal and conservative observers were quick to speak of “left-wing fascism” in the face of student rebellion was the aston-

²⁰ Gerd Koenen, “Der transzendental Obdachlose—Hans-Jürgen Krahel,” in *Zeitschrift für Ideengeschichte* 2, no. 3 (2008), 5–22.

²¹ See also Gilcher-Holtey, 1968.

²² The leaders of the March 22nd movement (Jean-Pierre Duteuil and Cohn-Bendit), for instance, claimed: “Some people have tried to force Marcuse on us as a mentor: that is a joke. None of us have read Marcuse.” See *The French Student Revolt*, 58.

ishing return of antiparlamentarianism—which had been such a distinctive feature of the 1920s. With antiparlamentarianism came the renaissance of thinkers from the beginning of the twentieth century, such as Vilfredo Pareto, Robert Michels, and other “elite theorists” who held that all organizations would develop oligarchies—except that these thinkers were now being used to show that liberal democracies had failed to make good on their promises of civic equality and that, consequently, a form of socialism was the only genuinely egalitarian alternative.

In many ways the students and other critics had a point when they saw postwar parliaments as merely stages behind which real power was negotiated in corporatist backrooms—and always with the same cast of players. The formation of the grand coalition in West Germany meant that there was only a small opposition party left in the Bundestag—which led to the call for an “extra-parliamentary opposition;” in Italy the Christian Democrats were constantly in power, refining their tactics for co-opting nominally competing parties like the Socialists and even making overtures to the Communists. In France, on the other hand, de Gaulle’s reign—while having ensured a level of political continuity and stability unknown under the previous Third and Fourth Republics—increasingly looked like a presidential dictatorship.

Arguably *the* political theorist of the German 1968 was Johannes Agnoli—his criticism of pluralism and parliamentarianism was central to the movement and would continue to form the basis of much left-wing thinking into the 1970s and 1980s.²³ Agnoli and his follow-

²³ He also had had an astonishing intellectual career, reminiscent of the interwar phenomenon of *rechte Leute von links und linke Leute von rechts*. He had been born in Valle di Cadore, a village in the Dolomites, in 1925. His family had been well-off: his father had been involved in smuggling alcohol in Argentina, then become an engineer and eventually turned into a highly respected notable in what was a rather left-wing small community. As a teenager Agnoli—always a contrarian, if those who knew him well are to be believed—had penned hymns to the Duce as a “defender of culture” and in 1943 volunteered for the Wehrmacht. He saw some combat with partisans in Yugoslavia before being captured by the British and being sent to a re-education camp in Egypt. In the 1950s he studied in Tübingen, wrote a dissertation on Giambattista Vico, and became a German citizen in 1955. For a while he was a member of the SPD and worked as academic assistant to a number of Marxist professors. Most witnesses agree that he never tried

ers started from the premise that the “bourgeois state” and capitalism were inextricably linked. Under the conditions of capitalism, no genuine democracy could ever be realized. The bourgeois state systematically contained popular sovereignty and the autonomous articulation of the desires of the population. However, rather than reverting to fascism—which was, after all, a failed strategy for controlling and diverting the mass desire for political self-determination—the bourgeois state transformed the existing institutions of parliamentary democracy in such a way as to make revolutionary change impossible, without having to resort to open oppression. This “transformation of democracy,” Agnoli argued, meant a “modernization of the state in the sense of an adjustment to the new forms of collective life (the so-called mass society) as well as an improvement in the sense of a modernization of the means of domination.”²⁴

The need for modernization was caused by “technical-economic progress” but was also driven by the “unified interests of the dominating groups.”²⁵ These “dominating groups” had a collective interest in defusing democracy as a potential means of what Harold Laski had once called “revolution by consent.”²⁶ Parliamentary democracy was, after all, not the most secure guarantee for capitalism. It was by its nature ambivalent: since, in theory, parliament could accurately reflect the basic social antagonism in society, and since it might be capable of overcoming it through majority decisions, it could serve as a springboard to socialism. Alternatively, it would continue to function as a highly effective means of preventing open terror and fascism by keeping up the facade of a pseudo-democracy.²⁷

Agnoli claimed that Parliament and a plurality of parties were essential in transforming democracy into a more effective means of domination. The kind of “unification” or political uniformity which the fascist state could only impose by one-party rule was now achieved

to hide his fascist past and in fact often spoke quite openly about it. Barbara Görres Agnoli, *Johannes Agnoli: Eine biografische Skizze* (Hamburg: Konkret Literatur Verlag, 2004).

²⁴ Johannes Agnoli and Peter Brückner, *Die Transformation der Demokratie* (Frankfurt/Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1968), 10.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.

through what was called “aligned pluralism.” Society had not overcome the basic dualism (and antagonism) between capitalists and workers, but the pluralism on display in parliament effectively veiled this fact. Through the negotiations between different parties and “social partners” such as employers’ associations and unions, social peace and the illusion of democratic participation for the masses could be maintained. Individuals would see only the “republic of the market”—not the “despotism of the factory.”²⁸

In addition, the institution of Parliament had itself become thoroughly corrupted. Legislative and executive power had been fused, and Parliament served as a *de facto* transmission belt between the oligarchy and the people. Borrowing heavily from Michels and Ostrogorsky, Agnoli argued that not only had parties become oligarchic, but Parliament itself had developed an oligarchic structure. Publicity and public reasoning, the characteristics of nineteenth-century liberalism, had been replaced by a “representation” which did not in fact reproduce, but repressed, the fundamental social antagonism. Rational deliberation could never address actual social conflict, because conflict remained hidden from view—even though, of course, rational deliberation had become impossible in an oligarchic parliament in any case.

Throughout this transformation into a democracy which kept the demos outside the doors of parliament, the official ideology of democracy was left intact—the only semantic change was that languages of humanism and technocratic necessities were supposed to supplant the language of class struggle among the workers’ representatives. Parties no longer knew workers and capitalists—only human beings as such. They no longer implemented platforms; they only observed economic and technological constraints. What a conservative politician had called “the abolition of the proletariat” only meant that class consciousness could be eroded through increasing mass consumption and other “grand attempts at collective corruption.”²⁹ Citizens were turned into nothing more than consumers.³⁰

In short, then, the state had been transformed into an authoritarian one without any outward change—and Parliament remained essen-

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 18 and 21.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 48.

tial in legitimating this situation. Just as Pareto, the “Marx of the bourgeoisie,” had advised Mussolini to keep Parliament as an “ornament” while transforming the Italian state into a fascist one, so the West German elite was engaged in a particularly perfidious game of anti-democratic deception.³¹

What, according to Agnoli, was the remedy for this situation? The answers to this question remained not only vague, but often contradictory. On the one hand, Agnoli hinted that societies which had not completely disintegrated were essentially beyond reform; revolution was the only real road ahead. On the other hand, he argued, in line with Kant’s “Perpetual Peace,” that international peace slightly increased the chances of “liberation.”³² But then again, the presence of Communist parties in some Western European countries also might alleviate a few of the problems posed by the transformation of democracy. Ultimately, however, the process seemed essentially unstoppable within the current parameters of legality.³³ Clearly, then, the bourgeois state had to be abolished. Yet Agnoli insisted that this had to be brought about through a “peaceful revolutionary process”—without much further specification of how such a process could be peaceful, if the manipulation of the masses was indeed as all-pervasive as he claimed.³⁴ In other words, he posed, rather than really answering, the question about the revolutionary subject. Someone seemed to offer answers, though.

Marcuse’s Answers

An important value—perhaps even the core concept of the international ’68 moment—was autonomy. After all, the American students’ 1962 Port Huron Statement had already declared that “the goal of man and society should be human independence.” Autonomy—understood as individual as well as collective self-direction (and therefore self-legislation and self-management)—was in many ways most obviously opposed to the postwar world of technocracy and bureaucracy.

³¹ Ibid., 11.

³² Ibid., 21.

³³ Ibid., 16.

³⁴ Ibid., 13.

Technocracy appeared to have expunged political will from politics, and even individual will from one's own personal life, which had to be fashioned according to the work and consumption imperatives of industrial society. The movement, according to Oskar Negt's observation in the 1968 issue of *Kursbuch* devoted to "students and power," was all about the "integrity of political will," and freely exercising one's political will according to a moral imperative of self-legislation. Yet, individual anti-authoritarianism was hard to square with the idea of a revolution, which, after all, appeared to require a revolutionary collective. It was a wide-open question, arguably *the* political question, who the carrier of revolution was going to be.

One theorist offered at least a tentative answer: Herbert Marcuse. Marcuse had studied with Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger during the Weimar Republic, fled the Third Reich, then operated on the margins of the Institute of Social Research in American exile, but also worked for the OSS. Efforts to return to Germany after 1945 proved unsuccessful. By the mid-sixties Marcuse was teaching in California—but his political-philosophical reach became global in a way that arguably has not been emulated by any philosopher since.

This reach had at least two major, seemingly contradictory, reasons: on the one hand, the resonance Marcuse's bleak assessment of "the reigning ideology of advanced industrial society," most famously outlined in *One-Dimensional Man*, found; but, on the other hand, the optimism radiating from his pronouncements that the completely marginalized in industrial society as well as third world liberation movements might be capable of bringing about radical transformations (if not *the* revolution). There was even some role for students.

This peculiar combination of despair and hope made sense in the context of Marcuse's overall diagnosis of a society characterized both by affluence and a kind of *gleichgeschaltete* culture. Many of the fundamental assumptions of Marcuse's theory have to be understood within the context of its time: Marcuse took for granted a society of abundance, of surplus riches, which existed, in his view, alongside poverty and oppression. It is crucial to remember that "1968" happened towards the end of a very long boom in Western economies that started with the Korean War and only finally came to a close with the oil crisis in 1974—although it is equally important to remember that thinkers argued for a socialism that would not just mean abundance but a different quality of life

and, above all, a new subjectivity (or, as Marcuse put it: a “qualitatively different totality”).³⁵

In many ways, Marcuse actually shared the diagnosis of what he called “advanced industrial civilization” with some of its conservative and liberal defenders, such as Ernst Forsthoff in Germany or Aron in France: the system seemed self-stabilizing and could absorb dissent without any major political disturbances. However, unlike many technocratic thinkers, Marcuse insisted that technology was precisely not a neutral instrument, but was a means of domination and crucial in shaping a particular kind of subjectivity. The rate of modernization in countries like France, Germany, and Italy had been unprecedented; for Marcuse it signaled a new “fatal unity” of productivity and what he called “destructivity”—destructivity, because Marcuse was concerned about the exploitation of nature, or what he referred to as “the ferocity of Man against Nature.” Marcuse was also critical of the rampant consumerism with which, in his view, the capitalists had effectively bought off the proletariat—in the process achieving a new synthesis of the welfare and the warfare state.

But apart from affluence, a notion of what can only be described as “false consciousness” constituted the other axiom of Marcuse’s thought. In particular, he argued that what previously still served as a means of contestation—the refusal of social conformism through great art, for instance—had now become a way of reinforcing the status quo, and of generating profits: “The music of the soul,” he claimed, “is also the music of salesmanship.”³⁶ Not just individual personalities, but culture as a whole, had become one-dimensional. And, most shocking at all for his liberal-democratic listeners, “democracy would appear to be the most efficient system of domination.”³⁷

Famously, Marcuse also argued that advanced industrial civilization did not simply “repress” sexuality. Instead, he claimed that a pseudo-liberation of the libido went hand in hand with a “de-eroticization” of the contemporary world for the sake of intensifying domination—and he would ask his readers to “compare love-making in a meadow and in an

³⁵ Herbert Marcuse, *Konterrevolution und Revolte* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1973), 9.

³⁶ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (1964; Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), 57.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

automobile, on a lovers' walk outside the town walls and on a Manhattan street."

At the same time, however, he claimed that under advanced capitalism, people were still profoundly repressed sexually. Offering a genuinely new synthesis of Marx and Freud, Marcuse argued that in fact civilization did not have to be repressive, or at any rate not as repressive as it was in capitalism. The present system, Marcuse insisted, was characterized by "surplus repression"—a repression which could be overcome not just by a release of sexuality, but by what Marcuse called "the transformation of the libido": namely from "sexuality constrained under genital supremacy to eroticization of the entire personality." It remained rather unclear what precisely Marcuse meant by this, but the general gist of his argument was clear: the preconditions for a genuinely free subjectivity had been met with the present state of Western capitalism; it was decisive to help that subjectivity to emerge through political struggle. Already at the end of *One-Dimensional Man* there had been a glimmer of hope when Marcuse spoke about

...the substratum of the outcasts and outsiders, the exploited and persecuted of other races and other colours, the unemployed and the unemployable. They exist outside the democratic process; their life is the most immediate and the most real need for ending intolerable conditions and institutions. Thus their opposition is revolutionary even if their consciousness is not. Their opposition hits the system from without and is therefore not deflected by the system; it is an elementary force which violates the rules of the game and, in doing so, reveals it as a rigged game.³⁸

In more confident mood towards the late sixties, Marcuse added that "the militant Liberation movements in the developing countries represent the strongest potential force for radical transformation." At the same time, he insisted that students as such were not carriers of the revolution: "I have never said that the student opposition today is by itself a revolutionary force, nor have I seen the hippies as the 'heir of the proletariat'! Only the national liberation fronts of the developing nations are today in a revolutionary struggle. But even they do not

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 256–7.

by themselves constitute an effective revolutionary threat to the system of advanced capitalism.”³⁹ However, Marcuse held out hope for a confluence of forces: third world liberation movements, marginalized groups in Western societies and students somehow working together. Whatever the details of the diagnosis, the main point was this: Marcuse seemed to be faithful to the original project of Critical Theory in that he linked theorizing (a theorizing that was grounded in empirical studies, but framed by normative philosophical goals) with actually existing historical subjects capable of bringing about change.

It was this special *theoretical* combination which contributed to Marcuse’s rise to international stardom. But the particular tone of his writings mattered, too: there was an existential urgency to it that few contending theorists could match. And try as he might to refuse the role of father-figure or “daddy” to the movement, he was regarded as a kind of patron.⁴⁰ There was talk of the three “M’s” that were all-important for the students: Marx, Mao, and Marcuse. He was received like a “messiah” in West Berlin in 1967 (his own observation, adding a fourth “M”).⁴¹ He simply seemed to understand the students and their motivations like few others. After all, he himself had still been formed by the German Youth Movement at the beginning of the century; he now advocated a heady mixture of “politics and eros,” a “new sensibility”; and, not least, he was able to make sense of the idea of total opposition and complete refusal which could not be bought off with a few reforms: he lauded even the hippies for their “aggressive non-aggressiveness” and their new “non-aggressive forms of life” (with their obvious antecedents in *Lebensreform*); and in the 1970s he endorsed Cohn-Bendit’s formula of a “unity of resistance and life.”⁴² Marcuse also embodied the curious mixture of European high theory and American popular culture which dominated the 1960s; and unlike other older representatives of Critical Theory, he was not only willing to engage with the students, but also to

³⁹ Herbert Marcuse, “The Problem of Violence and the Radical Opposition,” in: Herbert Marcuse, *The New Left and the 1960s* [Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse, vol. 3], ed. Douglas Kellner (New York: Routledge, 2005), 56–75; here 64.

⁴⁰ Herbert Marcuse, *Nachgelassene Schriften*, vol. 4: *Die Studentenbewegung und ihre Folgen*, ed. Peter-Erwin Jansen (Springe: zu Klampen, 2004), 105.

⁴¹ See the correspondence with Leo Löwenthal quoted in *ibid.*, 185–186.

⁴² Marcuse, *Nachgelassene Schriften*, 132.

encourage them to go beyond his own theories. He wrote to Theodor Adorno that he was ready to put up with (theoretical) patricide, even if he had to admit that it did hurt.⁴³

Most importantly, Marcuse, as an advocate of libertarian socialism, took the students seriously in a way that few others did—even if he was quite clear that students themselves were not a revolutionary subject at the present time (though he left open the possibility that the student opposition could “perhaps become a revolutionary force”).⁴⁴ After all, while in France the workers—though not the Communist Party, the “party of order,” and the communist trade union, the CGT—joined the students, no workers joined the students in Germany. But Marcuse, with his idea of all-pervasive manipulation and “moronization” (Marcuse’s expression), had a theory why this was so, and why revolutionary hope rested with marginalized groups (as well as Third World Liberation movements, even if those by themselves, he insisted, also could not overthrow capitalism as such). Marcuse also suggested a particular mode of action and political change that did not center on mass parties or a centrally organized coup, but that was aimed at a more “diffuse disintegration of the system”; through local and regional “open” and “autonomous” groups.⁴⁵ But like the leaders themselves, Marcuse argued that the precise nature of revolutionary goals and the best ways to oppose what he called the “neoimperialist, global reorganization of capitalism”⁴⁶ had to be discovered *en route*: practice could not be deduced from theory, but experiments in political action and local and regional “reformism” were to help theory-building along.⁴⁷ As Marcuse put it, “praxis does not come at the end, but at the beginning of theory, without thereby entering an area that would be foreign to theory.”

Workerist Autonomy and Beyond

Italy, quite apart from ’68, holds a special place in postwar European political thought: no other European country has thrown up as many radical popular movements from below—all against the background of

⁴³ Quoted by Peter-Erwin Jansen, “Vorwort,” in *ibid.*, 10.

⁴⁴ Marcuse, “The Problem of Violence”, 57.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 108–10.

⁴⁶ Marcuse, *Konterrevolution*, 12.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 139.

an unbroken continuity in conservative rule at the top: a unique combination of “social insurgency and political immobility.”⁴⁸ Also, nowhere else, one might say, did “May” last that long: in other words, nowhere else was the political, social, cultural and, not least political-philosophical upheaval often abbreviated as “May 1968” as drawn-out as in Italy (some observers have even spoken of a “creeping May”).⁴⁹ *Contestazione* lasted at least until the end of the 1970s and produced an enormously rich and diverse (and, some would say, confused and confusing) outpouring of radical political thought. Precisely because of this *longue durée*, it was credible for a theorist like Antonio Negri to claim that revolutionary experience and its theoretical formulation could proceed together—as opposed to theory having to precede praxis, or theory always trying to catch up with a fleeting moment that might not have lasted even a month (as allegedly was the case with France).⁵⁰ Moreover, only in Italy did the post-1968 political languages of anti-authoritarianism and older idioms of class conflict come together in a sustained manner—even if there were also major tensions between Old and New Left, between workers and the *movimento studentesco*, between Maoist and other radical left-wing groups and the Communist Party.⁵¹

Already in the late 1950s—and therefore earlier than in many other Western European countries—space had opened up beyond the Italian Communist Party (PCI) for a kind of theorizing which was less oriented towards the Soviet Union and the ideal of *fare come in Russia*. Instead, many theorists looked to Mao’s China; above all, however, they were much more determined than the PCI to bring about radical change in Italy itself. In particular, Raniero Panzieri had written in the Socialist Party’s *Mondo Operaio* in the 1950s specifically against the studied ambiguities of the PCI between reform and revolution, and instead affirmed his own unwavering belief in revolution—and, in particular, in the necessity to return class struggle to the factories, rather

⁴⁸ Tobias Abse, “Italy: A New Agenda,” in Perry Anderson and Patrick Camiller, eds., *Mapping the West European Left* (London: Verso, 1994), 189.

⁴⁹ Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of ’68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956–1976* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 111.

⁵⁰ Antonio Negri, *Du retour: Abécédaire autobiographique* (Paris, 2002).

⁵¹ Donatella Della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State: A Comparative Analysis of Italy and Germany* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

than hope for change through an alliance of the working class with progressive members of the bourgeoisie.⁵² Panzieri was interested in the theories of the Frankfurt School, but politically he sought above all to reunify the Italian Left—through stressing a return to the idea of factory councils and the importance of affirming the “revolutionary autonomy” of the workers’ movement.

When the Socialists joined the Christian Democrats in government, Panzieri resigned; in 1961 he founded the journal *Quaderni Rossi* (later complemented by Mario Tronti’s more radical breakaway publication *Classe Operaia*, a major journal of the New Left alongside the *Quaderni Piacentini*). Panzieri wanted to provide a platform for theoretical reflections around “workerism” (*operaismo*)—a particular focus on actual class struggles in factories, as opposed to political parties’ maneuverings within the established institutions of the Republic and the consensus politics to which virtually all European (non-communist) left-wing parties in the postwar period subscribed. Theorists of workerism conceived the working class as the driving force of capitalism and viewed the conflicts over wages and working conditions as intensely political; they built on empirical research conducted in the 1950s in the Fiat and Olivetti factories to demonstrate that the production process itself could be a primary form of domination. A new enthusiasm for sociology and empirical studies of industrial relations in particular were to inform the founding texts of the Italian *nuova sinistra* (a development paralleled in Germany and France); they reinforced the thought that it was plainly not enough to seize the means of production—the conditions of production themselves had to change and were a better starting point for revolutionary transformations than the statist “neoreformism” of the PCI. Not surprisingly, Panzieri and his followers were attacked by PCI representatives for “infantile leftism” and “spontaneism.”⁵³ And yet Panzieri was far from “spontaneous”: revolutionary activity, he held, had to be preceded by precise empirical analysis, theory-building and careful ideological schooling of a working class which—here the influence of the Frankfurt School was manifest—had apparently lost all real class consciousness.

⁵² Richard Drake, *The Revolutionary Mystique and Terrorism in Contemporary Italy* (Bloomington, 1989), 40.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 46.

Two of Panzieri's disciples disagreed: workerist analysis was to be radicalized and broadened by Mario Tronti and Antonio Negri; they were to be at the heart of the group Potere Operaio, founded in 1969; their *operaismo* increasingly sidelined the more anti-authoritarian strands of '68 political thought, as embodied, for instance, in Potere Studentesco. Both had been deeply impressed by the Fiat worker riots in Piazza Statuto in Turin in 1962; unlike Panzieri, they had seen it as evidence that revolutionary worker autonomy could in fact smash capitalism immediately, without going through supposed stages prescribed by orthodox Marxism. Tronti argued that the focus should be shifted from factories in a narrow industrial sense to the notion of the "social factory," that is, processes of domination in society as a whole; Negri, on the other hand, claimed that the idea of the "mass worker," i.e. the unskilled, particularly dominated worker who had been at the center of attention for *operaismo* initially, should be replaced with that of the "socialized worker"—like Tronti, he thought that factory discipline and domination had spread through society as a whole "like a virus." Negri also pointed to a whole range of groups outside the working class as traditionally defined: "precarious workers," students, the women's movement, and basically anyone connected with the family and education. Such a theoretical shift obviously helped with a redefinition of the revolutionary subject during the 1970s: further and further away from workers and towards individuals and groups generally willing to assert their autonomy (or deemed to be in need of asserting their autonomy). Moreover, Negri increasingly emphasized the importance of "constituent power"—the people at large—which was sharply distinguished from constituted power in the sense of state institutions traditionally understood.

Thus *operaismo* came to be replaced with *autonomia*; what remained the same was a rejection of any Leninist conception of a vanguard party as indispensable for revolution. At least in theory, formal party structure was de-emphasized in favor of local committees and networks (*comitati di base*), and direct actions by workers and other potentially revolutionary subjects—refusal to work, *autoriduzione* (the refusal to pay transport fares or rent), immediate appropriation of wealth and "worker self-valorization."

In a somewhat similar vein, groups such as Lotta Continua and its theorists were shifting attention from the idea of workers forming

some kind of “organic unity” with students to a renewed search for a revolutionary subject beyond supposedly privileged workers: women, the unemployed, and a range of marginalized groups were identified as a possible “real proletariat.” Even more importantly, the apparently ever-increasing polarization of Italian society led a number of theorists to claim that a real revolution had actually become possible in the 1970s, and that a final clash between the forces of reaction and “the real proletariat” might be imminent and could lead to genuine liberation. The building of cultural hegemony—which the PCI advocated, using a version of Gramsci carefully tailored for its purposes—was rejected in favor of direct political confrontation. As is well known, that direct confrontation failed—the Italian state, not least with the help of the PCI, survived both peaceful contestation and “direct action” by terrorist groups, hitting back hard at the entire counterculture. This leads once more back to the question whether the true nature—and the real theoretical innovations—of ’68 have not to be found in the realm of culture. That is, culture not as something dissociated from politics, but as the very matrix of collective life.

Situationism: Ending the Separations of Art, Life, and Politics

I said at the beginning of this essay that there was a great emphasis on spontaneity in ’68. However, some of that emphasis on spontaneity was not spontaneous; more or less elaborate theoretical justifications preceded it. Central in this respect was the Situationist International—arguably the theoretically most original group of thinkers of the 1960s, with the almost mythical figure of Guy Debord at its center. The movement aimed to “revolutionize everyday life” and seemed to owe more to Dadaism than any traditional left-wing doctrines. The Situationists strove for a “different life” than the one dominated by productivist consumer capitalism, a playful one that unfolded very day, not just during official leisure time to be filled with more or less commodified experiences. They found philosophical and historical inspiration in the work of Johan Huizinga, who had written about human beings’ “ludic instinct”; Huizinga’s *Homo ludens*, originally published in 1938, opened a way to perceive true humanity as play,

rather than production. As Débord put it, “it is now a question of converting the rules of play from an arbitrary convention to a moral foundation.”⁵⁴

At the core of Situationism was the idea of creating situations as moments of poetic intensity, of glimpses of what a different, real life would be like. A new “psycho-geographical” experience would be had in cities, where the ideas of *dérive*—drift—and *détournement*—detour, but also rearranging and re-functionalizing—could be practiced. Both were shorthand for a kind of subversion, the idea of hunting for intense personal experiences in an urban environment that seemed to have been constructed in the name of soulless instrumental rationality only. But again, there was an element of strategy, too; as Débord put it: “More than one to whom adventures happen, the adventurer is one who makes them happen... The construction of situations will be the continuous realisation of a great game, a game the players have chosen to play...” He also insisted that “what changes our way of seeing the streets is more important than what changes our way of seeing painting.” Another Situationist thinker, Raoul Vaneigem, insisted: “Guerilla war is total war. This is the path on which the Situationist International is set: calculated harassment on every front—cultural, political, economic and social. Concentrating on everyday life will ensure the unity of the combat.” The goal, then, was “immediate participation in a passionate abundance of life”; and the methods—if that was the right word—were experiments in living, “harassment” and simply behaving differently.

Was this simply an update of *épater les bourgeois* by thinkers whom the *Nouvel Observateur* called “Saint Justs in leather jackets”? The same magazine asserted: “Certainly, Situationism is not the spectre which has been haunting industrial civilization, any more than communism was truly the spectre haunting Europe since 1848. But it is an ideological sign.”⁵⁵ Only: an ideological sign of what, one would have to ask? Arguably of an intense dissatisfaction with what came to be seen as an ever more manipulative and oppressive consumer and media society. This was most clearly expressed in Débord’s November 1967 treatise

⁵⁴ Quoted in Andy Merrifield, *Guy Débord* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005), 28.

⁵⁵ Quoted in Andrew Hussey, *The Game of War* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2001), 219.

The Society of the Spectacle. Neatly divided into numbered paragraphs, the treatise started out with the assertion that “the whole life of those societies in which modern conditions of production prevail presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. All that once was directly lived has become mere representation.”⁵⁶ In Débord’s view, the spectacle served “as total justification for the conditions and aims of the existing system”⁵⁷; it appeared as all-powerful, as beyond human control. Ultimately it reflected the prevailing relations of production. In that sense, Débord was updating familiar Marxist ideas—about false consciousness in particular—for the media age. Suggestive, even poetic formulations abounded: “the spectacle is the bad dream of modern society in chains, expressing nothing more than its wish to sleep. The spectacle is the guardian of that sleep.”⁵⁸ Or, again paraphrasing a rather conventional leftist idea:

At the root of the spectacle lies that oldest of all social divisions of labor, the specialization of power. The specialized role played by the spectacle is that of spokesman for all other activities, a sort of diplomatic representative of hierarchical society at its own court, and the source of the only discourse that society allows itself to hear. Thus the most modern aspect of the spectacle is also at bottom the most archaic.⁵⁹

These notions were eventually tied back to a thorough questioning of the state as an institution as such. Débord claimed that “the social cleavage that the spectacle expresses is inseparable from the modern State, which, as the product of the social division of labor and the organ of class rule, is the general form of all social division.”⁶⁰ Anti-statism was not central to Situationism; but its basic analysis implied as much. Hence also the rather conventional institutional solution Débord proposed in the latter sections of *The Society of the Spectacle*:

⁵⁶ Guy Débord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Zed Books, 1967), 12.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

That “long sought political form whereby the economic emancipation of labor might finally be achieved” has taken on a clear outline in this century, in the shape of revolutionary workers’ councils vesting all decision-making and executive powers in themselves and federating with one another through the exchange of delegates answerable to the base and recallable at any time...

And he went on:

Once embodied in the power of workers councils—a power destined to supplant all other powers worldwide—the proletarian movement becomes its own product; this product is the producer himself, and in his own eyes the producer has himself as his goal. Only in this context can the spectacle’s negation of life be negated in its turn.

Though it seemed minuscule and marginal at the time, Situationism had arguably been at the heart of the ’68 that later came to be remembered and that seemed to matter in the long term: the slogans about liberated subjectivity, the emphasis on everyday life, and, in the broadest sense: culture. As self-declared “pariah-elites,” the Situationists had sought to stage “events” which might or might not find an appropriate interpreter and which were free from all bourgeois concerns about “legitimacy.”⁶¹ Situationist action had to be direct and immediate, and ideally would inspire new passions and desires, redrawing the entire map of the “psycho-geography” of the modern city.⁶²

To be fair, the importance of any of this had not at all been seen at the time; and to the extent that he was known to the more obviously political leaders of ’68, Débord was disliked, or even despised: Cohn-Bendit did not hesitate to call him a “nasty bastard.” And in fact, quite early on, a split had emerged between Situationist and *communard* figures like Frank Böckelmann and Dieter Kunzelmann on the one hand and, on the other, the anti-authoritarian Dutschke as well as the more

⁶¹ Frank Böckelmann, “Anfänge: Situationisten, Subversive und ihre Vorgänger,” in *Die Emanzipation ins Leere: Beiträge zur Gesinnungsgeschichte 1960–2000* (Berlin: Philo, 2000), 26–27.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 41.

orthodox socialist theorists.⁶³ The latter were all preoccupied with the purity of Marxist theory—strongly flavored with a Protestant, even puritan, devotion to the revolutionary cause. Where the anti-authoritarians were struggling to reconcile the demands of provocative spontaneity in response to revolutionary occasions with the need somehow to organize the movement, the members of a Situationist group like *Subversive Aktion* boldly declared that the meaning of organization was its failure.⁶⁴ No wonder that the Marxisant theorists charged them and the leaders of the new *Kommunen* (famous for slogans such as “Fuck for Peace”) with quasi-anarchist “false immediacy” (*falsche Unmittelbarkeit*) as the prime theoretical and practical sin.⁶⁵

Also, as it turned out, the libertarian “experiments in living” were not nearly as liberating as the protagonists claimed—in fact, they often resulted in the worst kind of sectarianism and intense psychological terror for some of the participants. Still, they did provide a model which partially spawned the large “alternative” and “autonomous” milieus, parts of which were to persist for decades. These milieus—devoted to peace, environmentalism, and feminism—tried to demonstrate to bourgeois majorities what a truly liberated egalitarian life could be like, in the absence of the violent overthrow of existing political institutions.

Intentions and Consequences Revisited

It is easy to see in retrospect why in 1968 alarm bells rang for conservatives and liberal anti-totalitarians. The students despised Parliament much as the immoderate Left and Right had done in the 1920s, and their emphasis on spontaneity, on the immediacy of experience, evoked memories of the youth movements and *Lebensreform*, if not the Anabaptists and religious revivalism. The hard-won gains for a more liberal

⁶³ Ulrich Chaussy, *Die drei Leben des Rudi Dutschke: Eine Biographie* (Zurich: Pendo, 1999), 44–53.

⁶⁴ Frank Böckelmann and Herbert Nagel, eds., *Subversive Aktion: Der Sinn der Organisation ist ihr Scheitern* (Frankfurt/Main: Verlag Neue Kritik, 1976).

⁶⁵ It is telling that Dutschke did not join the famous Berlin Kommune 1, but instead sought to create a “Wissenschaftskommune.” The Kommune leader Kunzelmann in turn famously declared: “Was geht mich Vietnam an—ich habe Orgasmusschwierigkeiten.” See Hecken, 1968, 117.

political culture in countries like France and Germany seemed to be squandered, as Raymond Aron, among others, complained bitterly.

However, there is little doubt that in the long run, political cultures became more liberal, at least in certain respects. To be sure, '68 did not somehow "cause" all large-scale social and cultural transformations from the sixties onwards, but it did become shorthand for some of them, and not without reason. In its wake emerged a quasi-libertarian language of subjectivity—foreshadowing the "Me Decade" and what Marcuse had warned about as a "politics in the first person" (*Politik in der ersten Person*)—and, more importantly, a new politics of individual lifestyles. All over Europe, the traditional family came under attack—in some countries, like Italy, for the first time.⁶⁶ The young and, in particular, the students, the sons and daughters of the *Mittelstand* and of the *ceti medi*, who had been on the right for most of the twentieth century (and highly active in the promotion of fascism in the 1920s and 1930s), were now clearly to be found on the left.

At the same time, there was a widespread loss of belief in the capacity of societies for collective self-transformation *through mass political action focused on political institutions* (as traditionally understood). Instead, individual transformations mattered—as did the idea of a whole socio-cultural reconstruction of society. The year 1968 and its immediate aftermath called into question traditional concepts of the political, tearing down the ideological firewalls between the public and the private, and making culture and everyday experiences explicitly political (the resonances of Situationist thought should be obvious here).

Perry Anderson had jubilated that the "long night of theory" finally was over in the 1960s (in Britain, at any rate)—but the dawn did not herald anything like a conventional political revolution. Instead, there was a revolution in values, culture, and attitudes which, at least for the moment, left political institutions intact. It also completely sidelined established (and in a sense loyal) oppositions such as the French Communist Party, which reacted with impotent fury to the students, as did some leading intellectual supporters of the communist parties: already in June 1968 the director Pier Paolo Pasolini had published an anti-student poem in the magazine *Espresso*, which began: "Now the journalists of all the world (including / those of the television) / are licking

⁶⁶ Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy* (London: Penguin, 1990), 304.

your arses (as one still says in student / slang). Not me, my dears / You have the faces of spoilt rich brats..."⁶⁷

The most important of the real revolutions was undoubtedly feminism, or what is usually referred to as "second-wave feminism," in contrast with struggles for political rights, and suffrage in particular, earlier in the century. The 1950s consensus politics had been paternalist—and in many ways patriarchal. Women having the vote virtually everywhere in Europe after 1945 did not obviously change this fact. Yet second-wave feminism was not a part of '68 in a narrower sense—it was a negative reaction to it.⁶⁸ "Student leaders" after all had been men who sent women to make the tea or coffee, who had them copy the flyers—and who generally liked having them around as revolutionary groupies, not to mention what came to be known as *sozialistischer bumszwang*.⁶⁹

Feminists ended the tendency to subsume "women's concerns" within a larger socialist struggle, where male workers' interests always came first. There were parallels with other struggles, to be sure: the fact that the oppressed did not even have their own language to start with; the difficulties, even embarrassment, of trying to articulate their situation and possible remedies. Existing "theory" did not help—on the contrary. As Sheila Rowbotham pointed out in 1969:

There is not only the paralysis there is the labour of making connections. Theory and the removed language in which it is expressed presents a means of going beyond the immediate. It crystallises innumerable experiences, it puts a canopy over the world which enables it to be regarded as a relating whole. It makes reality intelligible. But this theory is constructed from the experience of the dominators and consequently reflects the world from their point of view; they however present it as the summation of the world as it is.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Quoted in Ginsborg, 307.

⁶⁸ Although this point has sometimes been exaggerated: Marcuse, for instance, was highly sympathetic to feminism and understood its theoretical and practical importance.

⁶⁹ Dutschke once wondered about the enormous revolutionary impact if all housewives went on strike—but did not follow up on this thought.

⁷⁰ Sheila Rowbotham, *Women's Liberation and the New Politics*, Spokesman Pamphlet, no. 17 (n.d.).

The point was that women's liberation should not simply operate with the previous model of exploitation and oppression. As Rowbotham argued:

The subordination of women cannot be reduced simply by [sic] our exploitation either as a class or our exploitation at work. These exploitations are part only of the oppression of some women. The full extent of our oppression is not fully revealed by the isolation of these particular forms of exploitation. The woman question is not comprehensible except in terms of the total process of a complete series of repressive structures. Thus the particular form of domination changes but the process operates in both pre-capitalist and post-capitalist society. The function of revolutionary theory is to keep track of this moving shape of these subordinations. Such a revolutionary theory is compelled to be continually reforming and recreating itself.⁷¹

To be sure, there had been feminist theory before, in particular Simone de Beauvoir's seminal *Second Sex*, which had famously argued that woman served as "the Other" of man; and that one became a woman, rather than being born one. She had called on women to realize that their ovaries would not condemn them "to be on their knees for eternity." But the feminism of the late 1960s was more radical than de Beauvoir's existentialist feminism—as well as more broadly based and offering concrete strategies for wide-ranging legal *and* social change. It also had more immediate results, in particular with regard to reproductive choice: the 1970s saw reforms of divorce laws (or the introduction of divorce laws for the first time, such as in Italy), and, most importantly, the relaxation or de facto abolition of prohibitions on abortion.

With '68 and after, state authority—and deeply ingrained habits of deference and systems of hierarchy—came under severe attack. The consensus politics shared by "smug conservatives, tired liberals and disillusioned radicals" (as C. Wright Mills put it) was shattered for good; "bipartisan banality" (again, Mills's phrase) was over. Nevertheless, states survived—and '68 failed, as far as political institutions were concerned. What changed for good, however, were *moeurs*: as Umberto

⁷¹ Ibid., 29.

Eco pointed out: “Even though all visible traces of 1968 are gone, it profoundly changed the way all of us, at least in Europe, behave and relate to one another. Relations between bosses and workers, students and teachers, even children and parents, have opened up. They’ll never be the same again.”⁷² Or, put more succinctly by Niklas Luhmann: after ’68 “one could walk across the lawn.”

Sixty-eight also succeeded spectacularly as a form of social-cultural criticism, or, in the words of British New Left theorist Stuart Hall, “cultural rebellion.” Most of the theory described in this essay has long been forgotten or at least ceased to have any real hold on the political imagination, but the ’68er *style* of criticism, not least the imperative to be subversive (itself soon to a new orthodoxy, to be sure) have shaped intellectuals and public cultures for decades.⁷³ There is something to Marcel Gauchet’s recent observation that the ’68ers turned out to be a politically dominant generation—while remaining intellectually dominated.⁷⁴ During ’68 they remained in the shadow of Marx, Mao, Marcuse, and many other fathers and forefathers; after ’68 many turned to structuralism or post-structuralism, or they became epigones of liberal political philosophy. But the notion that we are dealing with a “generation of disciples” goes only so far: second-generation feminists were not intellectually dominated, and neither was a thinker like D  bord.

It is eminently debatable whether this cultural liberalization in the end was precisely the kind of “repressive desublimation” of which Marcuse had been afraid and whether the much-discussed “pluralization of lifestyles” actually made capitalism more legitimate, as many observers have once again asserted on the fortieth anniversary of ’68. Certainly for those with larger ambitions for institutional political change, there remain the two virtues which Agnoli held to be essential for a true revolutionary: irony and patience.

⁷² Quoted by Robert Lumley, *States of Emergency: The Cultures of Revolt in Italy from 1968 to 1978* (London: Verso, 1990), 2.

⁷³ Marcel Gauchet, “Bilan d’une g  n  ration,” in *Le D  bat*, no. 149 (May 2008).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

AURELIAN CRAIUTU
Thinking Politically

Raymond Aron and the Revolution of 1968 in France

*“Libéral et démocrate, j’avais en politique
deux passions: la France et la liberté.”*

Raymond Aron

As Raymond Aron pointed out in his memoirs, his reflections on 1968 have made him, almost against his will, a political actor rather than merely a committed observer.¹ One of France’s most prominent pub-

¹ Raymond Aron’s writings include not only reflections on abstract topics such as the philosophy of history, war in modern society, and the virtues and limitations of liberal democracy, but also systematic and well-informed commentaries on concrete issues such as the war in Algeria, the students’ revolt of May 1968, American foreign policy, and the Soviet Union. Aron’s most important works, in particular *Peace and War*, *The Opium of the Intellectuals*, *Main Currents of Sociological Thought*, *Essays on Liberties*, and *Clausewitz*, along with his writings on Marx and his followers, shaped the intellectual climate in France and gained wide recognition in the United States five decades ago or so. Aron never held any political office and was only a simple member of the Rally of the French People from 1948 to 1952. For an excellent intellectual portrait of Aron, see Pierre Manent’s essay “Raymond Aron—Political Educator,” in Raymond Aron, *In Defense of Liberal Reason*, ed. Daniel J. Mahoney (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1994), 1–23. Raymond Aron’s memoirs are another key source of information for any interpreter of his works. For a detailed analysis of Aron’s political theory, see Daniel J. Mahoney, *The Liberal Political Science of Raymond Aron* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1992); Nicolas Baverez, *Raymond Aron* (Paris: Flammarion, 1993); Stephen Launay, *La pensée politique de Raymond Aron* (Paris: PUF, 1995); and Brian Anderson, *Raymond Aron: The Recovery of the Political* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997). A discussion of Aron’s “morality of prudence” can be found in Daniel J. Mahoney, “Raymond Aron and the Morality of Prudence: A Reconsideration,” *Modern Age*, 43 (2001),

lic intellectuals, Aron wrote a number of important articles on the events of May–June 1968 in France in *Le Figaro* and devoted an entire book to this issue entitled *La Révolution introuvable*.² Although Aron's book had a rather narrow scope and focus, it elicited contradictory interpretations and, to use Serge Audier's phrase, gave birth to many "*aronismes imaginaires*."³

La Révolution introuvable was much more than a circumstantial work and is undoubtedly one of the most important testimonies on the events of May–June 1968. In its pages we see Aron reflecting on what had occurred in 1968 with the characteristic mixture of detachment and intellectual responsibility that marked his entire career. In the foreword to the English translation of the book (*The Elusive Revolution*) written in June 1969, Aron modestly described his volume as "a personal book, which is less concerned with the students' troubles as such than with the national crisis of May to June 1968 and with the enthusiasm shown by grown men who thought they were living, or re-living, a revolutionary epic."⁴ To his credit, Aron refused to give a one-dimensional explanation of the crisis of 1968 and resisted the temptation of settling scores with his critics. Instead, he insisted that the *journées* of May 1968 defied any interpretation that focused on a single aspect of the events.

243–252; also Philippe Raynaud, "Raymond Aron et le jugement politique entre Aristote et Kant," in *Raymond Aron et la liberté politique: Actes du colloque international organisé par la Fondation Joseph Károlyi et l'Université de Sciences économiques et d'Administration publique de Budapest* (Paris: Fallois, 2002), 123–131. Also worth consulting are the articles on Aron published in *Commentaire* 28–29 (1985) and *European Journal of Political Theory* 2 (2003).

² These articles, along with the book, were reprinted in a recent collection of Aron's most important writings entitled *Penser la démocratie, penser la liberté* (Paris: Gallimard, Quarto, 2005). This edition also includes *La Révolution introuvable*. Unless specified otherwise, all translations are mine.

³ Serge Audier, *La Pensée anti-68: essai sur une restauration intellectuelle* (Paris: La Découverte, 2008), 53.

⁴ Raymond Aron, "Preface to the English Language Edition," in *The Elusive Revolution: Anatomy of a Student Revolt*, trans. Gordon Clough (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1969), xviii. In the same preface, Aron confessed: "Had I written it, however, a year after the events, rather than a few days after, when I was still in the grip of indignation, I would probably have not expressed myself in the same terms." *Ibid.*, xiii.

In this chapter I examine Aron's narrative and interpretation of the causes of the events, as well as his critical reflections on the profound problems afflicting French society in the 1960s. Next I turn to Aron's metaphor of the "committed observer" (*spectateur engagé*) and comment on his views on the role, virtues, limits, and possibility of moderation in political life. Aron's reflections on the events of May–June 1968 offer an excellent opportunity to explore this topic in detail.⁵

I would like to add a disclaimer at this point about the difficulty of commenting in an unbiased and non-partisan manner on the events of 1968. On the left, many believed in the justice of students' (and workers') demands, and a certain nostalgia for the romantic enthusiasm of May 1968 has remained alive to this day. Then there are also those who thought that the Fifth Republic went through a much-needed renaissance in 1968 and applauded the events of May–June for having shaken French society from its bourgeois complacency. On the right, the contestation of 1968 also took various nuances and forms. The participants in 1968 were taken to task for promoting anarchy and license and endorsing a pernicious form of relativism that led to a new "transfiguration" of values, as illustrated by one of the students' preferred slogans: "Vivre sans contraintes et jouir sans entraves." The debate has recently been resurrected in France, where President Nicholas Sarkozy campaigned for election a few years ago by claiming that the outcome of the presidential election would demonstrate whether the heritage of 1968 should be kept alive or liquidated once and for all.⁶

Moreover, we should not forget that 1968 was a global phenomenon not limited to France. Nurtured by an ideology of liberation and a spirit of revolt that had deep roots in the political and social events

⁵ Two of Aron's works stand out in this regard: *La Révolution introuvable*, and *Le spectateur engagé* (re-edited in the United States as *Thinking Politically*), featuring the dialogue between Aron and two younger interlocutors, Dominique Yolton and Jean-Louis Missika. Aron himself expressed a particular liking for this book, which was favorably received by the French press in the early 1980s. In addition to these two volumes, also worth consulting are Aron's *Memoirs*, *The Opium of the Intellectuals*, and a few important essays such as *Fanaticism, Prudence, and Faith* (republished as an appendix to the 2001 new English edition of the *Opium*), "History and Politics," and "Three Forms of Historical Intelligibility."

⁶ Cited in Audier, *La Pensée anti-68*, 5.

during the first two decades of the Cold War, the moment of 1968 was much more than a French phenomenon. The events of 1968 united in spirit the students of Berkeley with those in Paris and the demonstrators at Columbia with those in Prague and Mexico City. And it would be impossible to assess the causes of 1968 without drawing the appropriate relationships with the civil rights movement in America, the rise of feminism, and the consequences of the Second Vatican Council. After all, the students involved in the revolts of 1968 belonged to a generation which had not experienced WWII firsthand and was impatient to break away from old patterns of authority.

The Singularity of France

Before I turn to Aron's reflection on 1968, I would like to comment briefly on the singularity of French political culture, which combines a well-known tendency to radicalism with a lesser-known tradition of (reflection on) political moderation. It would be difficult to deny that among all European countries (with the exception of Russia), the French have displayed the strongest propensity to extremes and a particular attraction to various forms of radicalism—political, intellectual—over the past three centuries. It has sometimes been argued that, from time to time, France makes a revolution without being able to undertake real reforms. As Tocqueville wrote in *The Old Regime and the Revolution*, France has always been a country of paradoxes, “more capable of heroism than of virtue, of genius than of common sense, ready to conceive vast plans rather than to complete great tasks.”⁷ What other country has simultaneously given the world the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of Citizen* and the Terror of 1793? What other country had produced spirits as different as Descartes and Bossuet, Montaigne and Pascal, Rousseau and Constant, Robespierre and Napoleon, Sartre and Aron? In all its incarnations, France emerged as “the most brilliant and dangerous nation of Europe, and the best suited to become

⁷ Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the Revolution*, edited by François Furet and Françoise Mélonio, trans. Alan S. Kahan, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 246.

by turns an object of admiration, of hatred, of pity, and of terror, but never of indifference.”⁸

As Aron pointed out, it was France among developed countries that went the farthest in discovering the fragility of its own liberal political order during the events of May–June 1968. For him, what occurred in 1968 was simultaneously far more and far less than a revolution. Aron spoke instead of a genuine political crisis that combined the features of a genuine popular revolt and a psychodrama (the political crisis, Aron wryly remarked, “ended” a few days later with the return to the old order following a speech given by President de Gaulle). As Aron himself put it, the events of May–June 1968 proved once again that the French nation was not cured yet of the “revolutionary virus”⁹ that has been at the heart of modern French history for the last two centuries. A nation that tends to create intellectuals rather than citizens, France has had a revolutionary soul allowing and encouraging demonstrators in the streets to make and unmake governments as they thought fit and allowing intellectuals to have a dismissive and derogatory attitude toward political institutions.¹⁰ Almost alone among other European countries, France has been to this day a country where many intellectuals “admire only destruction without conceiving of an order susceptible of replacing the one that they want to destroy.”¹¹ As a result, conflict in the streets has been viewed by many as preferable to rational debate and compromise, and most political crises have never been solved at roundtables but only *in extremis* at the highest possible level.¹² Furthermore, Aron pointed out that French cul-

⁸ Ibid., 247. In Aron’s words, “La France éternelle, peuple léger, brillant, imprevisible sur lequel personne ne peut compter, aujourd’hui apparemment apathique et demain sur les barricades.” Raymond Aron, *Penser la démocratie, penser la liberté* (Paris: Gallimard, 2008), 731. The English translation of Aron’s book (*The Elusive Revolution: Anatomy of a Student Revolt*, trans. Gordon Clough, New York: Praeger, 1969) is occasionally unreliable.

⁹ *Penser la démocratie, penser la liberté*, 629.

¹⁰ Writes Aron: “Le système français souffre d’une grande faiblesse, il crée des intellectuels plutôt que des citoyens. Beaucoup acquièrent en même temps une admiration extrême pour la culture française et un mépris extrême pour les institutions politiques de la France.” Ibid., 696.

¹¹ Ibid., 707.

¹² This is how Aron described France in 1968: “Un souverain qui veut changer par décret les mœurs et obliger tous les Français—sauf lui—au dialogue;

ture combines an egalitarian nostalgia with a rigid strict hierarchy and bureaucracy, a phenomenon highly visible in the French universities, which are a microcosm of these uniquely French tensions and paradoxes. The attachment to hierarchy has been accompanied by “an intransigent demand for equality,”¹³ which has often been followed by violence in the streets.¹⁴ As Aron himself noted in a previously published book, *Espoir et peur du siècle* (1957), France developed a disquieting “propensity to extremism, defined less by the authentic desire for violence than by the temptation to unconditionally reject the existing regime.”¹⁵ After 1945 this propensity to radicalism manifested itself through the strong influence exercised by the French Communist Party (which, among all Western European parties, arguably had the closest ties with Moscow) and the resurgence of anti-parliamentarism in various forms.

And yet, appearances notwithstanding, the French political tradition also offers an excellent starting point to anyone interested in studying the virtues and limitations of political *moderation* and the limits within which one can be at once an objective (or a dispassionate) spectator and an effective political actor. It is precisely because France has had a long record of radicalism in politics that it has also devel-

une intelligentsia, partagée entre l’hermétisme, le maoïsme, et le culte de la violence; un gouvernement de fonctionnaires, capables d’obéissance et de commandement mais non d’art politique; un parti communiste, resté intérieurement stalinien, aux prises avec des factions révolutionnaires et soucieux de maintenir ses positions dans les syndicats et les administrations; une Université déchirée entre les PSU, et autres révolutionnaires, les communistes et les défenseurs de la tradition libérale; ... le gauchisme devenu le conformisme commun aux victimes et aux bénéficiaires du progrès économique: qui ne reconnaîtrait dans ce tableau véridique un pays qui recule devant la modernité et aspirant à l’impossible, se condamne lui-même au sous-développement.” Ibid., 719. Also: “En France, nous observons une tendance inverse: substituer la contestation dans le style des réunions publiques à la discussion rationnelle sur les sujets politiques. Cette dégradation morale équivaut à une catastrophe nationale.” Ibid., 652.

¹³ Ibid., 661.

¹⁴ Writes Aron: “La contestation générale de l’autorité tient pour une part à la psychologie nationale, elle représente la contre-partie de la répression hiérarchique et autoritaire, qui semble venir du fond des âges et qui prend de nouvelles formes dans la société moderne.” Ibid., 675.

¹⁵ Aron, *Espoir et peur du siècle* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1957), 143.

oped, at the same time, a certain tradition of political moderation in response to various forms of extremism. Aron's sober reaction to the episode of 1968 is a telling testimony in this regard, and his political moderation must be studied in the larger context provided by the writings of Montesquieu and Tocqueville, two moderates whom Aron appreciated and carefully studied.

Aron and the Events of May–June 1968

If 1968 was a global phenomenon, nowhere else did the events take such a dramatic course as in France, where no one anticipated that the revolt of the students at Nanterre would quickly spread to Sorbonne and then to the whole country. Within the span of a few days, France became paralyzed, as workers joined the students protesting in the streets, staging the largest national strike in the history of twentieth-century Europe. In Paris, the rules of everyday social intercourse ceased to work, and angry students wrote on the walls of Nanterre, "Professors, you are past, and so is your culture!" Their protests spread, forcing the closure of the Sorbonne for only the second time in its 700-year history. Students also put forward bold demands such as the abolition of exams and participation in the major decisions regarding the administration of the universities. President Charles de Gaulle came close to conceding power in his unfortunate television address of May 24, 1968, in which he proposed an ill-advised yea-or-nay national referendum on his government at the very moment when some prominent members of the Communist Party were somewhat skeptical toward the student revolt. Their future leader, George Marchais, dismissed Daniel Cohn-Bendit as a mere "*anarchiste allemand*," whose actions he criticized because they allegedly played into the hands of the capitalists.

As Julian Bourg has recently reminded us, what is remarkable about the events of May 1968 is that many people really believed at that time that a monumental social and political revolution might be underway, without that actually being the case.¹⁶ In her account of

¹⁶ Julian Bourg, *From Revolution to Ethics: May 1968 and Contemporary French Thought* (Montreal McGill-Queen's University Press), 4.

1968 and its aftermath, Kristin Ross pointed out that 1968 brought with it new and valuable organizational forms and practices, among them the famous *comités d'action*, that sought to disengage themselves from conventional politics and proposed a new political style by combining discipline and improvisation, centralism and self-government in an original way.¹⁷ According to Ross, they were looking for new forms of representation and social relations while using older Maoist forms of mobilization experiments containing a good dose of utopianism. And yet all this turned out to have surprisingly little enduring *institutional* influence over time, and a great deal of the original enthusiasm dissipated soon after June 1968.

How can we account for all these paradoxes? There are many possible explanations, and probably no single account could render justice to the complexity of the events of May–June 1968. Here I want to focus only on a few of them. First, the French Communist Party did not really want a revolution in France in May 1968. As Aron pointed out, the party was satisfied with de Gaulle's independent foreign policy, which was also appreciated by the Soviet leaders at that time for its independent stance toward Washington. The leaders of the FCP feared that other groups on the left might succeed in mobilizing the energies of the people more than the communists. Second, although the word *revolution* was on almost everyone's lips in May 1968, it was not in the end a "real" revolution according to the conventional meaning of the term. It did not lead to a change of regime; on the contrary, it consolidated de Gaulle's power for a few months (he resigned a year later). The elections organized at the end of June 1968 gave de Gaulle and his government more power than before, at least for about a year, and the country silently and calmly returned to work, prompting many observers to ask why the explosion of May 1968 changed French society so little.

Third, the libertarian favorite slogans of the students—"Demand the impossible," "It is forbidden to forbid!" and "Take your desires for realities"—may have appealed to those with libertarian leanings and surrealist sensibilities. Yet, it is hard to imagine how a new social

¹⁷ See Kristin Ross, *May '68 and Its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 90–99. For a critique of Ross from the left, see Daniel Bensaid, "Red and Black," *Radical Philosophy* 119 (May–June 2003), 1–4.

and political order might have been built solely on the rhetoric of self-realization and the enthusiastic spirit of revolt undergirding the participatory practices proposed by the *comités d'action*, given the rejection of the conventional principles of democratic legitimacy. Furthermore, there was a strange disconnect between the call for change in the West and the exciting political developments in Eastern Europe where, at about the same time, a period of liberalization came to an end with the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact armed forces led by the Soviet Union.

As Emmanuel Terray, who participated in the events of 1968, remarked, there was a significant discrepancy between the “cultural revolution” that the demonstrators in Paris dreamt of and the real Cultural Revolution attempted by Mao in Beijing that led to the loss of many lives and the curtailment of basic civil and political liberties.¹⁸ While some of the participants in the events of 1968 had clear anti-Stalinist views, others displayed a spirit of revolt that entertained many illusions about the real nature of communist totalitarianism.¹⁹ A few years later, the publication of *The Gulag Archipelago* in France triggered the first end (*avant la lettre*) of the Cold War in Paris, two decades earlier than the actual fall of the Iron Curtain in Eastern Europe. The return of (Anglo-American) liberalism peaked in the 1980s and 1990s, with many of Aron’s former students playing a role in this velvet revolution on the banks of Seine.

But the real significance of the events of May 1968 came from elsewhere. First, as Aron himself pointed out in his memoirs published fifteen years later, in spite of their heterogeneous nature, the events themselves revealed, beyond the strikes and the student protests, a genuine political crisis²⁰ that French political elites were not fully prepared to tackle. Second, the events of May 1968 gave the notion of revolution a new broader meaning as organized revolt against dominant social, political, and cultural norms.²¹ “This revolution,” Aron wrote, “was at the same time anachronistic and futurist: anach-

¹⁸ See Terray’s confession in Ross, *May ’68 and Its Afterlives*, 96.

¹⁹ Daniel J. Mahoney, “1968 and the Meaning of Democracy,” *Intercollegiate Review* (Fall 2008), 6.

²⁰ Aron, *Memoirs: Fifty Years of Political Reflections* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1990), 323.

²¹ Bourq, *From Revolution to Ethics*, 6.

ronistic in the dream of the Commune, or of the students' power, futurist in spite of a utopian language to the extent that it stands up against the sclerosis of organizational structures."²² This may explain why the revolution of 1968 still evokes and triggers strong emotions and disputes; the fascination that it continues to exert today must be interpreted and evaluated in the light of May 1968's liberating spirit and dreams of emancipation from the constraints, values, and principles of modern capitalist society. Many participants in the events of May 1968 sought to reject an old world they deemed inimical to their dreams of self-realization and proposed a new one in which the reformed social relations would diminish the alienation characteristic of modern society. This was done sometimes through the lenses of a largely imagined communist society that was quite different from the real existing communism of the Warsaw Pact and China. Nonetheless, in their attempt to "go to the people," the intellectual leaders of 1968 failed to articulate a coherent political program, even if some of them saw the events of 1968 as "the archetype of public happiness."²³

Tocqueville Redivivus

Rejecting the spirit of 1968 as a regrettable youthful error or praising it as an unforgettable moment of liberation would fail to capture its complexity. To fully understand the significance of the events of 1968, Aron opined, one must take into account the student revolts that occurred throughout the whole world in the 1960s, from Japan to France and from Berkeley to Dakar. They challenged old authorities such as the Catholic Church, the universities, and the military, and unfolded in a way similar to the revolution of 1848.

Aron liked to compare his skepticism toward the revolution of 1968 with Tocqueville's and Marx's mordant critiques of the revolution of 1848 in France. He claimed the right to be as severe in his criticism of the events of May 1968 as the socialist Proudhon, the com-

²² *Penser la démocratie, penser la liberté*, 672.

²³ The phrase belongs to Martine Storti, cited in Ross, *May '68 and Its Afterlives*, 100.

munist Marx, and the liberal Tocqueville were in their critiques of the actors of 1848. Aron refused to admire what he called the pseudo-Jacobin clubs, where pseudo-revolutionaries held interminable discussions about pseudo-reforms, and where law professors found pseudo-justifications for the violations of the very laws they were supposed to teach others to respect.²⁴

In the early 1980s, looking back at the events with the benefit of hindsight, Aron remarked that the French people had conserved an exceptional talent for making something out of nothing and creating dramatic events on which intellectuals are tempted to comment forever. The words he chose to describe the events—irrationality, psychodrama, delirium—were undoubtedly harsh and hyperbolic. “I do not know of any other episode from the history of France that conveys the same degree of irrationality,” Aron wrote.²⁵ In his opinion, the actors of 1968 and their admirers who encouraged the “sacralization of delirium”²⁶ fell prey to utopianism by dreaming of and seeking to recreate a new state of nature while forgetting the lessons of a century and a half of revolutions. Those who sang the praises of May 1968, Aron claimed, wrongly believed that they went beyond Marxism. In reality, they relied on nothing else than an odd mixture of ideas deriving from pre-Marxist utopian socialism with strong libertarian proclivities. In so doing, they forgot the lessons of history and ignored the objective constraints of economy and society in general.

These statements, along with the characterization of the events of May 1968 as a psychodrama, were polemical claims that invited, in turn, a Manichean rejection from those who disagreed with Aron’s views. Although Aron might have been carried away by passion in judging the events of May–June 1968, there was nothing more un-Aronian than the idea of dividing the world into good and bad guys. Never courting popularity, he opposed such a Manichean interpretation,

²⁴ Aron wrote: “Pourquoi admirer ces pseudo-jacobins ou des pseudo-révolutionnaires discutant sur des pseudo-reformes dans des séances interminables! Pourquoi admirer les professeur, de droit constitutionnel violant la légalité et trouvant de pseudo-justifications à des structures pseudo-révolutionnaires, à des constitutions pseudo-novatrices, non susceptibles de fonctionner?” *Penser la démocratie, penser la liberté*, 706.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 618.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 611.

and anyone who would apply this black-and-white *grille de lecture* to his writings would misunderstand his real intentions. He tried to play the role of a committed observer who did not want to take issue with individual actors, but with those of their ideas which had (or could have had) significant political consequences. "I try to explain," Aron wrote, "that is, to fight less against people than to fight for ideas."²⁷ A cursory re-reading of the articles he published in *Le Figaro* during the crisis of 1968 shows that he did not limit himself to the common narrative "revolution or psychodrama," "carnival or tragedy," and sought to interpret the events of May–June 1968 from a larger sociological point of view (I should note in passing that the first who described the events of 1968 as a psychodrama *sui generis* was none other than Aron's colleague, Alexander Kojève).²⁸

In so doing, Aron accomplished at least two important things. First, he sought to understand why the revolution of 1968 happened at all and what were the deeper causes of *le mal français*. France, Aron noted, lacked intermediary bodies and its presidential republic had not given the opposition sufficient institutional leeway. Secondly, true to his principled rejection of political Manicheism, Aron refused to apply a black-and white, Left-Right dichotomy to the events of May 1968.²⁹ He understood that the ideological language of 1968 transcended party programs and signaled a larger social discontent. As Aron remarked in his memoirs, this vocabulary revived and popularized themes that could be found in widely-read books of cultural criticism. In fact, as Aron pointed out, most of the themes discussed in May 1968 had previously been touched upon by Marcuse in his influential *One-Dimensional Man*: the limits of commercial society, forced consumption, waste, and alienation. "In this domain," Aron wrote, "the revolutionaries made friends by popularizing an ideology that did not coincide with

²⁷ Ibid., 612.

²⁸ Kojève was on good terms with Aron. He called him on May 29 to assure him that the events of '68 were not a revolution (nobody wanted to kill anyone), but rather "a ruissellement de connerie" (apud Baverez, *Aron*, 388).

²⁹ "Rien n'est plus loin de ma pensée que d'établir une discrimination entre ceux qui sont entrés dans le jeu et ceux qui l'ont refusé, entre mauvais et bons. Il y a des 'mauvais' et des 'bons' dans les deux catégories : pas de règlement de compte." Ibid., 742–743.

the ideology of any of the parties: quality against quantity, a comfortable life against the pursuit of a high standard of living.”³⁰

It is also worth noting that the passion with which Aron wrote about the events of May–June 1968 came from at least two other sources. The first one was his profound attachment to France. Aron, who came from a Jewish family in Lorraine, where devotion to France had always been a special, almost sacred, feeling, asked: “Could any Frenchman for whom patriotism still means anything be a witness of the decomposition of French society, of the collapse of the edifice which has been built with so much toil after the catastrophe of 1940, without feeling a kind of despair?”³¹ The indifference which many young and older people displayed for the fate of political institutions in France in 1968 shocked Aron to the very core of his being. The second source was related to the first one: Aron felt indignation at the behavior of some of his colleagues who took part in a significant number in the students’ violent demonstrations and took delight in the blows which the Fifth Republic and its political institutions received.

Aron was aware of the responsibilities that came with his status as a public intellectual in 1968. He distrusted the bold philosophical explanations of events put forward by some of his colleagues who predicted the end of modernity. “I am terrified by these great sweeping bird’s-eye view perspectives,” Aron wrote. “I confess my ignorance in this regard.”³² In writing the editorials for *Le Figaro*, Aron’s main ambition was to hasten the mobilization of the isolated (moderate) voices and sound an alarm that would temper the dominant revolutionary enthusiasm. During the first period of the events of May 1968, Aron, who spent a few days far away from France (he was lecturing in the United States when the crisis started) abstained as much as possible from adding to the general confusion among his countrymen. It did not take him long, however, to discover that many intelligent people whom he had respected until then enthusiastically agreed with the students’ attempt to bring down all intellectual and social hierarchies without which, they thought, French society could properly function in the long run. What Aron found surprising was to discover that a

³⁰ Aron, *Memoirs*, 324.

³¹ Aron, *The Elusive Revolution*, xv.

³² *Penser la démocratie, penser la liberté*, 635; see also 615.

good number of his colleagues were ready and willing to curtail or give up seminal civil and political liberties in exchange for a form of proto-socialist libertarianism based on a romantic cult of authenticity and violence. Unlike anywhere else in the world in 1968, French teachers and civil servants willingly and blithely broke the law, showing a profound contempt for legality. Criticizing this attitude, Aron expressed concern for the fact that many of his colleagues endorsed the restriction of certain liberties deemed to be fundamental. Moreover, there was a hiatus between the disproportionate nature of the demonstrators' demands and claims and the sudden decomposition of French society amidst what Aron provocatively (and perhaps unfairly) called a "collective delirium."³³ He also believed that the demonstrators seriously confused anarcho-syndicalism and *l'autogestion*, and ignored the inevitable and ineradicable tensions between the constraints of rationality, justice, and the functioning of industrial society.

In Aron's view, this idea of a libertarian revolution opposed to any form of domination was an untenable concoction of pre-Marxist socialism, anarcho-syndicalism, and Proudhonism that did not have an adequate understanding of the constraints undergirding the political and economic spheres of modern society. Without being a dogmatic partisan of the status quo, Aron pointed out that the contestation of hierarchies and the rejection of the supremacy of technological rationality was unlikely to usher in the discovery of an original third way between—or beyond—communism and capitalism: "In reality, [the revolution] did not prove that self-management of enterprises, of the university, or of society at large, the elimination of hierarchies and of the separation between the masses and leaders offered a radically original third way between Sovietism at least liberalized and more-or-less socialized capitalism."³⁴

Once again, Aron noted, France succumbed to the old temptation, also denounced by Tocqueville (in *The Old Regime and the Revolution* and *Recollections*), of applying an abstract ("literary") spirit to the messy and chaotic sphere of politics. As Aron wryly pointed out, the "carnival" had very little to do with the construction of a new society, with a new order, even in the university. The only ideology of the

³³ Ibid., 618.

³⁴ Ibid., 610.

student revolt was the rejection of every kind of discipline, but, Aron added, the students' anarchist propensities were ultimately incompatible with the organization of modern industrial society.³⁵ Thus, in his analysis, the events of 1968 were driven by a combination of individualist libertarianism and the old French skepticism toward conventional forms of parliamentary government. In a country that had traditionally lacked a tradition of self-government, a concept such as direct democracy without permanent delegation was little more than the imagined counterpart of the real society in which administrators are permanent and their power real.

What Aron's Critics Missed

Aron was far from being a conventional right-wing critic of the events of May–June 1968, and his critique of the ideas of the revolutionaries in Paris did not amount to a wholesale rejection of the principles undergirding the moment of 1968, as Sartre famously argued in a vitriolic attack on Aron and de Gaulle, "The Bastilles of Raymond Aron," published in the June 19, 1968, issue of *Le Nouvel Observateur*. Sartre, whose main target in this article was de Gaulle, also accused Aron of cowardice and endorsing violence and unfairly presented him as the hated symbol of a university with which Sartre himself was no longer familiar.³⁶ At the same time, I want to point out that a few of Aron's closest associates, such as François Furet and Pierre Hassner, parted company with some parts of his interpretation of 1968. Furet reminded Aron that demagogues also existed on the right in 1968, something that Aron glossed over.

Aron chose not to respond to Sartre's accusations and did not feel the need to defend himself, since he believed that the facts spoke for

³⁵ Ibid., 687.

³⁶ Here is what Sartre wrote: "At the summit, we see the politics of cowardice. But at the same time, among the rank and file, there is a call for murder. For de Gaulle's call for the creation of civic action committees is precisely that. It is a way of saying to people: join together in your neighborhood to beat up those who, in your opinion, are expressing subversive opinions, or who are behaving in a way that threatens the government." Quoted in Aron, *Memoirs*, 327.

themselves. Not only did Aron not dismiss the ideas of 1968, but he claimed on numerous occasions that, in spite of their political immaturity, the revolutionaries of May 1968 had to be taken seriously, because they showed once again the fragility of liberal order and institutions: "They will not build a new order, but they have in effect made a breach in the wall of the old order through which other unpredictable forces may flood."³⁷ As such, the events of May 1968 displayed both the best and the worst ideas and claims, often expressed in a sincere but ultimately confusing language.³⁸ Aron went so far as to claim that although the revolution of 1968 lacked a clear ideology and plan, it was "the most profound and interesting revolution of the century, since for some people, the absence of any project demonstrated a greater ambition and a more thorough questioning of social order."³⁹

Some of Aron's critics have overlooked this point and failed to give him credit for having exposed the deeper (and enduring) causes of the French *malaise*: the weakness and vulnerability of intermediary bodies in French society, and the tendency toward centralization. A close reader of Tocqueville, Aron was aware that French civil society was surprisingly weak and did not offer a reliable means of solving political crises in due time. It was this weakness that had allowed minorities, in French universities and in French society in general, to play a key role in the mobilization of violence in 1968. In this regard, it is worth noting that Aron's analysis was identical to that of Jean-Pierre Vernant who, from a different political angle, also criticized de Gaulle's presidential regime for having suppressed or weakened the representative institutions of parliamentary democracy that could have served, during periods of crisis, as a salutary "buffer between power and the people."⁴⁰

Last but not least, many of Aron's critics have failed to give him credit for the *manner* in which he defended the principles of liberal capitalist societies. Aron justified his allegiance to open society and liberalism by resorting to a complex and nuanced sociological analysis of modern society that sought to determine and evaluate critically

³⁷ *Penser la démocratie, penser la liberté*, 610.

³⁸ "Les événements de Mai charrient le meilleur et le pire, l'utopie avec sa réalisation illusoire et des revendications valables, exprimées dans un langage confus." *Ibid.*, 672.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 689.

⁴⁰ Jean-Pierre Vernant, cited in Ross, *May '68 and Its Afterlives*, 59.

the economic and social conditions that permit freedom and pluralism to survive in modern society. In so doing, he spent a great deal of time and energy studying various aspects of modern society: economics, social relationships, class relationships, political systems, and relations among nations. In the 1950s and 1960s, Aron rejected the once-famous (and now largely forgotten) theory of the convergence of capitalism and communism and believed that capitalist liberal societies could be peacefully reformed in spite of their inherent shortcomings.

While being fully committed to such principles as freedom, pluralism, and rule of law, Aron opposed the dogmatic interpretation of these values and realized that the endorsement of the principles underpinning Western liberal democratic societies is not supposed to be a synonym for complacent conservatism. Although strongly opposed to single-party rule and totalitarianism, Aron was never an ideologue of capitalism such as Ayn Rand or Milton Friedman. "I have tried to serve the same values in different circumstances and through different actions," Aron wrote. "Having political opinions is not a matter of having an ideology once and for all; it is a question of taking the right decisions in changing circumstances."⁴¹ Our opinions, he insisted, must be based on the careful consideration of facts and should take into account the ways in which changing circumstances affect our decisions, strategies, and goals. During the crisis of 1968, Aron remarked that the events demonstrated that *la société de consommation* must be appreciated for what it is worth. It must not be rejected for faults that are not its own; nor should it be idolized for its imaginary virtues. Neither production nor consumption, Aron reminded us, can give an ultimate meaning to our individual lives; such a deeper meaning remains beyond the sphere of offer and demand. A metaphysical critique of capitalist society that ignores the lessons of history and the constraints of economy is different from a purely technocratic analysis dealing with numbers and facts.

Finally, Aron insisted, there was another positive outcome of 1968: the rejection of a certain style of authority incompatible with the prin-

⁴¹ See Aron, *Thinking Politically*, 150; for more details on Aron's method, see also *ibid.*, 201, 250. Another interesting text is Aron's essay, "History and Politics," originally published in 1949 (an English translation can be found in Aron, *Politics and History*, 237–248).

ciples of modern society. He unambiguously welcomed this rejection and remarked that the age of bureaucratic authoritarianism was over. Not surprisingly, Aron criticized the rigid political style of President de Gaulle that, in Aron's opinion, had to change by becoming more open toward the opposition and more welcoming toward civil society.

An Illustration of Aron's Reformism

Aron's critics and opponents labeled his attitude toward the revolutionary *journées* of May 1968 in Paris "conservative," ignoring the fact that he had been one of the most vocal defenders of reform in French universities. Aron was often described and criticized as a rigid defender of the Gaullist establishment, and some went so far as to suggest that was a paid agent of the CIA or other secret services. Referring to the manifestation of support for de Gaulle and his regime on May 30, 1968, on the Champs-Élysées, Kristin Ross wrote that "intellectuals like Raymond Aron marched beside the lumpen dregs created by the colonial wars—the secret societies, parallel police, hit men, strike breakers, *anciens combattants*, and hired thugs that had rallied to de Gaulle's summons."⁴² What Ross forgot to mention was not only that respectable people on the left like Kostas Papaioanou marched with Aron on May 30, 1968, but also that Aron had been one of the most lucid and persistent defenders of the cause of Algerian independence. Among Aron's opponents, the prevalent attitude was that "he has not understood us or May 1968."⁴³ Nonetheless, a reconsideration of Aron's position shows that the situation was much more nuanced than his critics would want us to believe. Aron played the unpopular role of a trimmer, concerned with keeping the ship on an even keel in times of social and political unrest.⁴⁴

⁴² Ross, *May '68 and Its Afterlives*, 59.

⁴³ Aron, *Memoirs*, 313.

⁴⁴ The classical definition of the "trimmer" was given by Halifax in *The Character of a Trimmer*: "This innocent word *Trimmer* signifieth no more than this, That if Men are together in a boat, and one par of the company would weigh it down on one side, another would make it lean as much to he contrary; it happeneth there is a third Opinion of those, who conceive it would

Aron's attitude with regard to the French academic system is a good case in point, for he belonged firmly and unambiguously to the camp of *reformers*. He left his tenured position at Sorbonne a few months before the events of May 1968, to protest the administration's refusal to upgrade the curriculum and improve the selection of students. Aron had criticized the *baccalauréat* as too difficult an examination for the completion of secondary studies and insufficient as a means of selection for admission to the university. He took the *agrégation* to task because it did not guarantee the quality of education and failed to provide adequate training in research. Aron also denounced the total autonomy of professors, who behaved like uncontested masters in their chairs, while often remaining ignorant of what their colleagues were doing.⁴⁵ He refused to give the same course over and over again, as many of his colleagues used to do, and pushed for a more rigorous selection system of both students and professors. Last but not least, Aron criticized the French university system for being overly bureaucratic and centralized and lacking much-needed intermediary bodies. This centralized pattern triggered the politicization of French universities, which Aron unambiguously opposed.

Aron paid special attention to what happened within universities because he considered them a microcosm of the entire French society. It was not a mere coincidence that in 1968 Aron endorsed the depoliticization of universities and advocated a prompt return to legality.⁴⁶ In so doing, his attitude was far from conservative, as one might think, but profoundly reformist. Aron believed that the depoliticization of the university was the only possible way of distinguishing between those who genuinely wanted to reform the system and those who were after all satisfied with the status quo.⁴⁷ Aron's plea for a return to legality

do as well, if the Boat went even, without endangering the passengers." Halifax, *Complete Works*, ed. J.P. Kenyon (London: Penguin, 1969), 50.

⁴⁵ Aron, *Memoirs*, 314.

⁴⁶ "Nous devons dire non aux universités critiques ou révolutionnaires, qui ne sont pas des universités, mais des instruments révolutionnaires." *Penser la démocratie, penser la liberté*, 658.

⁴⁷ Here is what Aron wrote in one of his articles from that period: "Aujourd'hui, dans l'Université comme dans la République, un impérative et un seul: en finir avec la mascarade révolutionnaire, avec les comités d'action, les assemblées plénières et les assemblées générales, caricatures au troisième degré de la Commune jacobine, en bref, revenir à la légalité... pour permettre

within the realm of the university echoed his call to a return to democratic legitimacy at the level of the entire French society which he enjoined to respect the outcome of democratic elections.⁴⁸

Aron adopted a trimming attitude afterwards when he was invited to comment on the governance of the universities. "Whenever I discussed the future or questions of reform at university meetings," remembered Aron, "I was always on the side of the reformers. But as soon as I saw that honorable and decent teachers were being treated in a shabby manner, I defended them. I didn't agree with them, but I defended them."⁴⁹ Aron leaned to the "right" on the question of the selection of students by arguing for a more rigorous selection in admission to the university and making the *baccalauréat* an examination for the completion of secondary studies. But he also leaned to the "left" when pushing for greater autonomy for universities and a more open and competitive system of selection of both students and professors.

Aron and De Gaulle: Solidarity in Times of Crisis and Independence in Normal Times

It is now largely forgotten that Aron never held any important political office under the regime of President de Gaulle (with the exception of a brief period in December 1945–January 1946, when André Malraux invited Aron to serve as his chief of staff; Malraux was the minister of information in the government of de Gaulle at that time). Of course, Aron knew the General well, having spent a good part of the war in London, where he worked for *La France libre*. After the war, Aron became a militant in the Rally of the French People (RPF) led by de Gaulle from 1948 to 1952, but he never was a Gaullist in the proper sense of the word, and the General never considered him to be one of his closest allies in whom he could fully confide. Although Aron's status as a leading editorialist for *Le Figaro* imposed respect,

enfin la distinction entre ceux qui veulent réformer et ceux qui veulent manipuler." Ibid., 755.

⁴⁸ "Il importe d'abord restaurer le sens de la légitimité démocratique, c'est-à-dire, en notre siècle, de la légitimité électorale, seule protection contre la guerre civile et le totalitarisme." Ibid., 732–733.

⁴⁹ Aron, *Thinking Politically*, 215.

the president was not always in full agreement with Aron's allegiance to the principles of *Le Figaro*: "anticommunism, the defense of parliamentary democracy, European unity."⁵⁰ In 1959, when Aron published an article entitled "Adieu au gaullisme" in *Preuves*, de Gaulle allegedly said to Malraux: "He [Aron] has never been a true Gaullist."⁵¹ As Aron himself noted in his memoirs, "my relations with de Gaulle have always been ambiguous, even during the RPF, for reasons that are both obscure and profound."⁵² On more than one occasion, he criticized what he called a certain form of "Gaullist fanaticism" that went against the main principles of his own moderate and skeptical philosophy. "To be truly Gaullist," claimed Aron, "it was necessary to have faith in de Gaulle and to be ready to change one's opinions to agree with his. I could not do it, but that didn't prevent me from being André Malraux's *directeur de cabinet*."⁵³

In 1968, Aron made his objections known to the president, whom he criticized harshly for his inability to stage a dialogue with the opposition, and his rather childish dream of neutrality in world politics, which pleased the Soviet Union. Aron took de Gaulle to task for his arrogant remark about the Jews whom he described, in an infamous press conference on November 27, 1967, as "un peuple d'élite, sûr de lui-même et dominateur."⁵⁴ Aron did not accuse the general of anti-Semitism, but remarked that his words threatened to rehabilitate a certain anti-Semitic discourse at the highest level of the state. Aron's acid response came in the form of a short and penetrating critique entitled *de Gaulle, Israël et les Juifs* (Plon, 1968) that illustrated the strong disagreement between the two men on this issue. Yet Aron, who was a French patriot, a rationalist and atheist of Jewish origin, always refused to believe in the unique destiny of the Jewish people and was far from being a Zionist.⁵⁵ If Aron felt a certain solidarity with Israel, it was not grounded in religious terms, and he never endorsed the official Israeli

⁵⁰ Aron, *Memoirs*, 158.

⁵¹ Apud Baverez, *Aron*, 170.

⁵² Aron, *Memoirs*, 171.

⁵³ Aron, *Thinking Politically*, 101.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Baverez, *Aron*, 374.

⁵⁵ On this issue, see Aron's important confession to Victor Malka in 1983, quoted in Baverez, *Aron*, 381.

positions on the war of 1967. On the contrary, he warned the Israeli leaders that their attitude would eventually lead to a new war.

Although Aron's relations with Charles de Gaulle were ambiguous and occasionally tense, during the final week of May 1968 Aron openly declared his support for the President when the survival of the regime was in doubt. He also rejected the radicalism of Sartre, who accused de Gaulle of having launched a "call for murder."⁵⁶ Aron commented ironically: "Not even a vulgar demagogue would have used such an expression in reference to General de Gaulle, to a government that had tolerated the 'demos,' the semi-riots that had gone day by day."⁵⁷ Under the Fifth Republic, Aron's attitude toward de Gaulle was defined by the principle "Solidarity in times of crisis and independence in normal times." While in Aron's view, de Gaulle's foreign policy—"la politique du joyeux célibataire international,"⁵⁸—was sometimes unnecessarily provocative and even unrealistic, its main initiatives were in line with the general interests of the French Republic and the free world during the Cold War. At the time of the Liberation, noted Aron, General de Gaulle's government was "much the best and... it was necessary to support it." A decade later, de Gaulle's return to power, "even though the circumstances were unpleasant, was rather desirable"⁵⁹ because, thanks to his prestige, he had a better chance than anyone else to find a solution to the Algerian crisis. Moreover, Charles de Gaulle fought hard to restore a democratic republic, even if his constitutional plan gave the French president the opportunity "to exercise an absolute and limited power."⁶⁰

Aron supported de Gaulle in May 1968, but he did so by acting like a trimmer, not like an ideologue. He remembered: "General de Gaulle's arrogance had angered me rather than convinced me; the vio-

⁵⁶ See Aron, *Memoirs*, 326–328, and Aron, *Thinking Politically*, 209.

⁵⁷ Aron, *Memoirs*, 327.

⁵⁸ These are Pierre Hassner's words, as quoted by Pierre Manent in a dialogue with Nicolas Baverez, "Raymond Aron, le dernier philosophe des Lumières," published in *Le Figaro*, October 17, 2003, marking the twentieth anniversary of Aron's death.

⁵⁹ Aron, *Thinking Politically*, 101.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 256. The phrase is taken from an article of Aron in which he commented on de Gaulle's constitutional plans. The expression "absolute and limited" comes from Maurras.

lence of his divided opponents brought me back onto his side.”⁶¹ Aron reminded de Gaulle’s staunchest critics that the General nevertheless presided over a regime elected by universal suffrage that protected basic individual liberties and rights. Moreover, Aron, who again shared the concern of Tocqueville (in 1848) for the continuity of legal government, sincerely believed that the country would have faced a communist takeover if the joint forces of the students and workers succeeded in forcing the collapse of the Fifth Republic. A political moderate, Aron was firm in his defense of liberal principles on which an open society and a liberal university must be based. And he firmly rejected any attempt to turn the university into a political entity and transform students and teachers into active instruments through which the politicization of the university can be achieved.

In Aron’s view, de Gaulle was a perfect example of the charismatic leader who had “historic ambitions comparable to those of Washington”⁶² and was torn between his own personal ambitions and his sincere patriotism. Never did Aron claim that de Gaulle was the providential leader for France; he only made it clear that the General was the best solution in those turbulent circumstances. In an article published on the first anniversary of de Gaulle’s return to power, Aron concluded: “The Fifth Republic exists, and in present-day France, General de Gaulle is the best possible monarch in the least bad of possible governments. He possesses personal power, but he restored the Republic in 1945. He manipulated the 1958 revolution in order to produce an authoritarian republic, not fascism nor a military despotism. He wants to save the remnants of the French empire, but he has granted the territories of black Africa the right to independence.”⁶³ The choice of words on Aron’s part is a proof of his ambivalent attitude toward the man who left the political scene a year after the events of May 1968, following a popular referendum which he felt obliged to hold in light of his promise made on May 24, 1968.

⁶¹ Aron, *The Elusive Revolution*, xv.

⁶² *Thinking Politically*, 258.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

The Role of Public Intellectuals

In order to properly understand Aron's reaction to the events of 1968, a few words about his conception of the role of public intellectuals are in order. Because Aron was so attentive to the specific nature, constraints, and demands of the political sphere, he understood what is so peculiar (and difficult) about political judgment. He always aspired to be a committed observer and had first conceived of this idea while studying in Germany.⁶⁴ He distrusted the romantic intellectual eternally dissatisfied with the order of things and always prone to be seduced by words such as *alienation* and *authenticity*. Based on his firsthand experience with his fellow French colleagues, Aron argued that it is characteristic of intellectuals in general not to seek to understand the social and political world, its institutions and practices. Instead, what they most often want is to denounce the social and political order in which they live, because they feel overwhelmed by its complexity and murkiness. Aron criticized this tendency of intellectuals to denounce capitalist civilization too quickly as excessively rationalistic and anti-heroic without attempting to understand *sine ira et studio* the functioning of its institutions. He took to task those who, without knowing the basics of economics and sociology, indulged in endless diatribes against the rationalization of the soul and the (bourgeois) enthusiasm for efficiency and productivity and pretended to offer viable solutions to the alienation of the working classes.⁶⁵ As Aron noted in *The Opium of the*

⁶⁴ "Un beau jour," Aron remembered, "en me promenant le long du Rhin, j'ai pensé que je voulais être à la fois spectateur et engagé. Spectateur de l'histoire se faisant, et engagé dans cette histoire en train de se faire." "Auto-portrait," *Commentaire* 116 (Winter 2006–2007), 904.

⁶⁵ In this regard, Aron's argument bears some affinities with Hayek's or Nozick's explanations for intellectuals' general hostility to capitalism. In turn, Schumpeter pointed out, "Industrial and commercial activity is essentially un-heroic in the knight's sense—no flourishing of swords about it, not much physical prowess, no chance to gallop the armored horse into the enemy, preferably a heretic or heathen—and the ideology that glorifies the idea of fighting for fighting's sake ... withers in the office among all the columns of figures." Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1950), 127–128. Aron wrote: "La fonction

Intellectuals, intellectuals tend to refuse to think *politically* and “prefer ideology, that is a rather literary image of a desirable society, rather than to study the functioning of a given economy, of a parliamentary system, and so forth.”⁶⁶ As a result, intellectuals tend to form opinions based on emotions and moral imperatives rather than a careful analysis of each particular situation and put forward dogmatic interpretations of politics and society that fail to take into account the plurality of considerations on which political and economic actions ultimately depend.

Aron’s reflections on 1968 were grounded in his belief that every society is subject to *de facto* constraints: the need for production and organization, the imperative of efficiency, the need for hierarchy and rationality, for justice and bureaucracy. To understand the forces at work in political life, Aron wrote,

One must consider (1) the plurality of goals, from short-term to distant, from tactics to strategy; (2) the actor’s knowledge of the situation, as well as the relative effectiveness of means; ... (3) the nature, lawful or unlawful, praiseworthy or not, of the end or means in relation to religious, mythological, or traditional beliefs; and (4) the duly psychological motivations of the act, which is sometimes appropriate but sometimes apparently irrational with respect to the actor’s objective.⁶⁷

In other words, one must take into account the plurality of goals and perspectives of political actors and must seek to understand the functioning of political and economic institutions such as Parliament, the market, interest groups, and political parties. In turn, this requires an adequate perception of the wide range of available choices for reforming these institutions. In the end, Aron wrote, thinking politi-

critique devient nihilisme lorsqu’elle dénonce la société globalement sans aucune représentation d’une autre société, lorsqu’elle prêche le culte de la violence pure” (*Penser la démocratie, penser la liberté*, 707). Also: “la critique systématique de la société libérale par l’intelligentsia affaiblit, mine un ordre facile. Elle tend à donner mauvaise conscience aux responsables de la société et surtout à leurs enfants” (ibid., 708).

⁶⁶ Aron, *Thinking Politically*, 154.

⁶⁷ Aron, *Politics and History*, 48–49.

cally amounts to making a fundamental decision: "To think politically in a society, one must make a fundamental choice. This fundamental choice is either the acceptance of the kind of society in which we live, or its rejection. ... From this fundamental choice flow decisions."⁶⁸

Aron refused the posture of a seer or prophet and did not presume to know the future. He criticized those of his colleagues who worked with a simplified Manichean view of politics and thus failed to grasp and correctly interpret the antimonies at the heart of human condition and modern society, the inescapable trade-offs that people face in their daily lives. He distrusted those who attempted to reduce the complexity of social world to a few basic elements that would fit their black-and-white categories and concepts. Because politics involves constraint and a certain level of violence, it combines elements of morality and immorality in such a way that it often makes it difficult to apply unambiguous criteria for deciding upon the best course of action. Above all, Aron insisted that "politics is never a conflict between good and evil, but always a choice between the preferable and the detestable."⁶⁹ His reasoning was surprisingly simple, unencumbered by futile existential anxieties that had plagued Sartre's political works: "I have chosen the society that accepts dialogue," Aron claimed. "As far as possible, this dialogue must be reasonable; but it accepts unleashed emotions, it accepts irrationality. ... The other society is founded on the refusal to have confidence in those governed, founded also on the pretension of a minority of oligarchs that they possess the definitive truth for themselves and for the future. I detest that; I have fought it for thirty-five years and I will continue to do so. The pretension of those few oligarchs to possess the truth of history and of the future is intolerable."⁷⁰

In an age dominated by the politics of faith, Aron's approach belonged firmly to what he liked to call the school of suspicion. "In political affairs, he wrote, "it is impossible to demonstrate truth, but one can try, on the basis of what one knows, to make sensible decisions."⁷¹ In March 1968, the venerable Jean Monnet wrote to Aron to congratulate him on his courageous critique of de Gaulle's unfortunate remarks

⁶⁸ Aron, *Thinking Politically*, 44.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 242.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 252.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 264.

on the Jewish people. Monnet praised Aron's unique combination of passion, responsibility, and courage in unforgettable words: "It is a privilege to live in a civilization which makes possible the existence and expression of opinions like yours."⁷² Monnet's elegant words are as valid today as they were four decades ago.

⁷² Cited in Baverez, *Aron*, 385.

KAROL EDWARD SOLTAN

The Divided Spirit of the Sixties

Introduction

The sixties, with the year 1968 serving as their symbolic high point, are best understood in a broader historical context, as one of a sequence of three periods of heightened idealism since World War II. These periods can be dated roughly: 1943–1950 (between World War II and the Cold War), 1960–1972 (the sixties), and 1988–1994 (usually identified with the year 1989). We can trace through all these periods, despite their obvious discontinuities, the development of a project of a global civic awakening (now taking the form of a global civic society) in opposition to what we might call the Enlightenment *ancien régime*. It has been, and remains, a widely shared project of the awakening of human creative potential in all spheres (and not, as the overused word “creativity” might suggest, in creative writing or in arts and crafts). We create our actions, our interactions with others, our institutions and ideas, even the content of our consciousness. It is a project of making people into real agents, and not spectators or manipulated puppets. This is, or at least can be, more than a demand for freedom, autonomy, and emancipation. But it presupposes and incorporates freedom, autonomy, and emancipation.

The project has taken many forms and has had multiple theoretical formulations. In the sixties these included theories of human potential,¹ critical social theory (e.g. the Frankfurt School),² human-

¹ Abraham Maslow, *Motivation and Personality* (New York: Harper, 1954); Idem, *Toward a Psychology of Being* (New York: Van Nostrand, 1962); Colin Wilson, *New Pathways in Psychology: Maslow and the Post-Freudian Revolution* (New York: Mentor, 1972).

² Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason* (New York: Oxford, 1947); Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*. (Boston: Beacon, 1955); Idem, *One Dimen-*

istic psychology (e.g. Maslow),³ and philosophy of personalism (in the United States: Martin Luther King and others,⁴ in Prague: Patočka and Havel,⁵ in Kraków: Tischner and Wojtyła⁶). Much of what has been new, and much that has changed the world, in the three periods of heightened idealism since World War II can be seen as efforts to contribute to this project. It is a project unified by its commitment to develop human creative potential, but also deeply divided in its understanding of what that means.

We can organize our understanding of these differences by constructing two pure types. For the first type, the revolutionary destruction of inherited limits is the most perfect model of creation: creation involves the rejection or destruction of what came before, a liberation from the constraints of the past, in order to create something entirely new. The project of developing human creative potential can then be seen as a generalization of the experience of revolution, directed now not simply against an oppressive state, or an oppressive economic system, but against multiple forms of oppression, institutional and cultural. Liberation occurs on many fronts, all forbidding is forbidden, all authority is subverted: the authority of the state and the firm, of the university, the school and the parent, the authority of the text. With their eyes fixed on the student revolts of the sixties, and perhaps especially on the May 1968 events in Paris, and on the various forms of liberation that seemed to dominate the period, many identify the sixties with this ideal type.

This will not do. It obviously does not apply to the letter and spirit of the 1968 events in Warsaw or Prague. But this is not just a contrast of location, with the sixties under communism different from the sixties in the rich democratic world, and different still in the Third World.

sional Man (Boston: Beacon, 1964); Paul Connerton, ed., *Critical Sociology* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1976); Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973).

³ Wilson, *New Pathways in Psychology*.

⁴ James Farrell, *The Spirit of the Sixties: The Making of Post-War Radicalism* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997).

⁵ Aviezer Tucker, *The Philosophy and Politics of Czech Dissidence from Patočka to Havel* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000).

⁶ Karol Wojtyła, *Osoba i Czyn* (Kraków: Polskie Towarzystwo Teologiczne, 1969); Wiesław Bożejewicz, *Tischner: Poglądy Filozoficzno-Antropologiczne* (Warsaw: Łódźgraf, 2006).

Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement do not fit this model, and neither do the other reform efforts guided by the spirit of non-violence, of a politics of truth and love, and of a commitment to the principle of equal and inviolable human dignity. The spirit of Gandhi (truth and love, satyagraha and ahimsa), or of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (invoking human dignity in its opening phrases), was very much alive in the sixties, as it would be in 1989.

To understand the deep internal division of the spirit of the sixties, we need to articulate an alternative ideal type of what developing human creative potential means. Those whose perspectives approximate this second type do not see the elimination or the subversion of limits as the necessary prerequisite of human creative agency. Limits can be a means to enhance agency and to improve the world. And creation does not need to involve the rejection of the past, in order to replace it with the new. Creation is often a process taking place over time and thus requiring continuity and a certain form of loyalty, a civic loyalty, let us call it, to what we inherit from the past.

The Spirit of a Time and Place

By spirit I mean that component of the culture of a time or a place, or a situation, which guides efforts to improve the world at that time and in that place. It is a key component of what we might call the potential for improvement contained in a situation. Of course the spirit of most times and places will be divided, as indeed it was in the 1960s. But often there will be some dominant themes we can identify. So, for example, we can see the political history of much of Europe between 1789 and 1848 as a struggle between the forces that defended the inherited principle of dynastic legitimacy and the forces of improvement (reform and revolution) supporting liberty and the sovereignty of nations. The latter were the primary carriers of the spirit of that period. After 1848 we see the emergence of an alternative revolutionary project, an internationalist socialist revolution, so the spirit of that period was more deeply divided. It was also weaker and more narrowly contained. Idealism and its projects of improvement were marginalized; there were noticeably fewer revolutions in Europe after 1848. Realism and a preoccupation with survival (and hence security, and hence order) was

more dominant. Illusions were contained, order reigned. Bismarck and Louis Napoleon are the representative figures of the period. Marxist revolutionary parties, and their international organization, were until 1917 a contained threat.

The subject of this paper is the *spirit* of the sixties. What actually happened in the sixties is, of course, a much larger and more complex topic. What actually happens in any period of history is mostly a product of accident and error; most consequences are unintended. Beyond the randomness and chaos of accidents, beyond what makes history unpredictable, what happens depends also in predictable ways on who has the guns and the wealth, and how they bring their resources to bear on human actions and events. The Warsaw Pact invaded Czechoslovakia, and de Gaulle relied on the coercive apparatus of the French state to respond to the revolts we remember as "Mai '68." In the sixties, as in other periods, the powerful created incentives for others, and the weak responded to those incentives. But culture, including the way people think and feel, what they are conscious of and what they believe, which projects they take seriously, and which projects they cannot even imagine, also has a powerful influence on what happens. And the sixties are of continuing and profound interest because of the distinctive culture of that time, and especially because of the distinctive spirit of that time.

To understand the spirit of a period, even a rather recent period like the 1960s, an attempt to see it as the people then living and acting saw it, is at best only a starting point. The sixties were clearly a period of considerable intellectual and political confusion. So it would be better to approach the period in a manner that is sympathetic, but more distanced. I suggest we think of the period, as did many contemporaries, as part of the beginning of a new age. But we do not expect very articulate formulations in an early stage, and the sixties were certainly full of the wild and the inarticulate. The spirit of a new age remains hidden both by its own novelty and by the power of the old. In any case, I shall suggest, we can best interpret the sixties as showing us a deeply divided spirit of the new age. This division has remained with us, and we would do well to understand its nature, especially today as history accelerates once again.

The Boundaries and Context of the Sixties

The 1960s are a period of distinctive historical interest, but we will not understand them, or the nature of this interest, if we are literal in our demarcation of the period.⁷ Since the end of World War II, periods of dominance of realism alternated with periods of dominance of idealism. When realism dominates, politics and life are mainly concerned with survival, security, and order, the world seems stable, change seems difficult. “An alternative world is possible” is not a slogan with much purchasing power. When idealism dominates, by contrast, politics and life are predominantly concerned with improvements, reforms, even occasionally revolutions. The world is full of opportunities for change, or at least appearances of such opportunities. Masses of people believe that an alternative world is possible. The 1960s were neither the first nor the last period of idealism since World War II. They are best understood as part of a sequence of idealistic breakthroughs, a sequence that might indeed herald a “new age,” a post-Enlightenment age, or a post-modern age, or perhaps a new post-revolutionary stage of the modern transformation.

The first post-World War II idealistic breakthrough can be roughly dated from 1943 to 1950. It was the period of the great hope that accompanied the ending of the war. In a few places, that hope was killed early. I think of the Warsaw Uprising as the event that killed hope in Poland in 1944, for example. But elsewhere it survived longer, before finally succumbing to the realist spirit of the Cold War. This was a period of great enthusiasm for building global institutions (Bretton Woods, the United Nations), the beginnings of the European construction in the founding of the Council of Europe, and in the Schuman Declaration beginning the long process from which emerged the European Union. The new postwar idealism was expressed in a commitment to universal human rights founded on the principle of inviolable human dignity. The period saw also the beginning of the process of decolonization (in India and Indonesia) that would dominate so much

⁷ For an example, see Gerard J. DeGroot, *The Sixties Unplugged: A Kaleidoscopic History of a Disorderly Decade* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

of the global politics that followed, including the sixties. The great controversies over the war in Vietnam, a key feature of politics of the late 1960s, cannot be understood outside this context: American efforts there could be seen all too easily not simply as an element of the Cold War, but as a continuation of colonialism. The immediate postwar period also saw the continuing expansion of the communist revolutionary idea, with the next wave of triumphs of communist revolution (China). And during the sixties these continuing efforts were much celebrated: Castro and Ho were the heroes of new revolutions; Mao was a hero of both the revolution of 1949 and the Great Cultural Revolution of the sixties. But in the 1940s institutional inventions emerged that would create, over the decades to come, a quite different democratic world, including a new form of democratic state, featuring a complex maze of administrative agencies and powerful constitutional courts, and a new type of self-limiting social movement pioneered by Gandhi.

This first period provides a crucial and often forgotten context for the 1960s. But so does the period of idealism that followed the 1960s, which we can roughly date between 1988 and 1994. This period, which we are less likely to forget than the 1940s, featured the collapse of communism in Europe, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the end of the Cold War, the Maastricht Treaty (bringing to a new stage the development of European institutions), the collapse of the apartheid regime in South Africa, and a general wave of democratization.

In between came the sixties. The spirit of the period began to awaken even before the opening of the decade, but became more apparent in the early 1960s: the civil rights movement in the United States, the hopes aroused by the Kennedy presidency, the Vatican II Council of the Catholic Church, and the Port Huron Statement as the first articulation of more radical projects of change. The period ended sometime soon after 1972, the year that we can say marks the birth of a newly prominent and powerful global environmental movement (with the UN Conference at Stockholm and the publication of *Limits to Growth*⁸).

Between these early and late events, we saw the massive expansion and collapse of student rebellions (in Mexico, in Poland, in Western

⁸ Donella Meadows et al., *Limits to Growth* (New York: Universe Books, 1972).

Europe, in the United States, and in many other places), the development of multiple forms of counterculture, the events surrounding May 1968 in France (much more than a student rebellion), an effort to create a socialism with a human face in Czechoslovakia, and the Cultural Revolution in China. These were the more dramatic events. Others were often less dramatic, but with more significant long-term consequences. I will return below to some of them, including a Constitutional Council decision in France, and the kind of background cultural change that only survey research can reveal. The great uniting theme, I will argue, will be found in the beginning of the articulation of a project of civic creative agency and civic society. This project has become, in recent years, more fully explicit and more global. It is likely to play a prominent role in the next period of idealism, which perhaps is now beginning.

There is more continuity across these periods of aroused idealism than is immediately apparent. The theme of human dignity and human rights is continuous: from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the German Constitution, through the Vatican II emphasis on human dignity and the politics of civil rights, to the triumph of the idea of human rights in the 1980s, culminating in the miracle of 1989. The theme of anti-colonialism is continuous: from India and Indonesia, through Vietnam, to the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1989. The Gandhian theme is also continuous from the Gandhian contribution to the independence of India, through Martin Luther King, to Poland's *Solidarność*. In some ways, however, the sixties do stand out: the theme of the development of global institutions (prominent in the 1940s and after 1989) is submerged in the 1960s, made unimaginable by the Cold War context. But another theme is more prominent in the 1960s than in the other two periods: when the dust settled, it was cultural transformation that was more important than political transformation. So the sixties were in some sense deeper than the other periods.

The Spirit of the Sixties: The Project of Universal Creative Agency

An idealistic revolt against realism was certainly the most remarkable feature of the sixties. We can characterize the period further by specifying more precisely both the nature of the realism that was the target, and of the idealism that was the sixties' distinct contribution. The realism against which the sixties revolted might be called an over-determined realism. It was a cultural compound whose primary concern, for individuals and institutions, was with survival, and hence with security and order or regularity. But this classic realist pattern, with its skepticism about reform, about the possibility of alternative worlds, about the illusions and imaginative fancies of the idealist, is reinforced in modern civilization by a form of rationality that favors predictability through institutions (in bureaucratic organization, and in the rule of law understood in the classic nineteenth-century way: the *Rechtsstaat* as a predictable state) and through science as a form of knowledge searching for regularities in nature and in society. The realism of what we might call the Enlightenment *ancien régime* was, and is, more deeply preoccupied with order and predictability than previous *anciens régimes* might have been, based solely on their preoccupation with survival. Now social order has become more machine-like (with Taylor⁹ and the scientific management movement pushing the envelope), and culture has come to be dominated by certified experts trained to search for and recognize regularities and nothing else. The *ancien régime*, which was the target of the sixties, was indeed, at least in its inspiration, a science-based, machine-like technocracy of the type Theodore Roszak outlined in his influential attacks on it.¹⁰ It was, again at least in aspiration, the sort of "iron cage" Weber warned against.¹¹

⁹ Frederick Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management* (New York and London: Harper, 1911).

¹⁰ Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counterculture* (Garden City, NJ: Anchor, 1969); Idem, *Where the Wasteland Ends* (Garden City, NJ: Anchor, 1973).

¹¹ See Arthur Mitzman, *The Iron Cage: An Historical Interpretation of Max Weber* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1969).

Weber hoped for an injection of charisma into this world of bureaucracy and regimented expertise. Many others took a similar route, from the fascists turning to charismatic leaders, to Schumpeter's Nietzschean praise of the entrepreneur as the agent of creative destruction.¹² The old Enlightenment project of universal emancipation reached an impasse: it has turned oppressive and destructive. An alternative we can see more fully emerging in the sixties could be (but need not be) made continuous with the Enlightenment, but in place of the old project of universal emancipation, it proposed what I call here a project of universal human creative agency.

It was, and is, a deeply divided project: we see deep divisions between how creative agency is understood in practice, especially concerning the role of limits, and of the potential destructiveness of human creative agency, and deep theoretical divisions which put the whole project in question. The new project had its characteristic concepts and intellectual commitments: the idea of person and the philosophy of personalism, the idea of inviolable human dignity and of human rights, the various forms of humanism in theory and practice (from humanistic psychology to socialism with a human face), the idea and promotion of human potential, the notion that human beings are agents, not objects, responsible actors rather than things, but also citizens as co-creators of the world around them, and not subjects for whom loyalty means obedience.

Let us look at some details: in one of the more interesting attempts to interpret the period as a whole, James Farrell identifies the spirit of the sixties in the United States with political personalism.¹³ A number of key figures, Martin Luther King notable among them, in fact identified themselves explicitly with the philosophy of personalism. But a vaguer personalism was also a more pervasive influence. Farrell identifies ten assumptions of this more pervasive personalism, but three constitute its core:

1. The inviolable dignity of persons
2. Focus on the poor, marginal, despised, and dispossessed

¹² Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York: Harper, 1975 [1942]), 82–85.

¹³ Farrell, *The Spirit of the Sixties*.

3. Suspicion of formal institutions (“systems”) such as the state or the market, because of their impersonal treatment of human beings.

Among the episodes featured in the Farrell account, a prominent place belongs to the Port Huron Statement, the first manifesto of the Students for Democratic Society, more famous for its support of participatory democracy (on which more below). It declared in June 1962: “We regard men as infinitely precious and possessed of infinite capacities for reason, freedom and love... We oppose the depersonalization that reduces human beings to the status of things.”¹⁴

Not just American manifestos proclaimed the dignity of man. The Second Vatican Council of the Catholic Church was called to open the Church to the modern world and in the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, commonly known as *Gaudium et Spes* (promulgated on December 7, 1965),¹⁵ it spoke to that world in a manner whose repercussions reached far and with long-term effect. A church that had fought hard against the Enlightenment and against everything it associated with the Enlightenment, including most notably liberalism and democracy, now centered its message to the secular world on human dignity and human rights. Over the following decades a wave of democratization hit predominantly Catholic countries around the world. The contrast between Catholic and Protestant countries disappeared as a significant variable in sociologists’ and political scientists’ accounts of conditions favorable to democracy.¹⁶ And Karol Wojtyła, a personalist philosopher, whose political and moral commitments were profoundly shaped by the Vatican Council, and by *Gaudium et Spes* in particular,¹⁷ emerged as perhaps the most influential figure among those who contributed from below to the undoing of communism in Europe in 1989.

Wojtyła was not the only philosophical personalist whose mind was formed in the sixties, but whose greater influence was in the collapse of

¹⁴ Quoted in Roszak, *The Making of a Counterculture*, 58.

¹⁵ Vatican II, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (*Gaudium et Spes*), 1965.

¹⁶ Seymour Martin Lipset, “The Social Requisites of Democracy Revisited,” *American Sociological Review* 59 (1994): 1–22.

¹⁷ George Weigel, *Witness to Hope* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999).

communism. The Prague School of personalism included the two great figures of Charter 77, Patočka and Havel.¹⁸ And the Kraków school of personalism included not just Wojtyła but also one of the most influential (not about tactics, but about principles and ethics) “*maître penseurs*” of the Solidarity movement in Poland, Józef Tischner.¹⁹

A more informal personalism was everywhere. In *The French Philosophy of the Sixties*, their account of what they call the “*pensée '68*,” Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut²⁰ discuss critically the anti-humanist and anti-personalist theories (and anti-philosophical philosophies) of the French sixties (“the autonomy of the subject is an illusion”), but they note the paradox that the political practice of “*Mai '68*” was quite otherwise: “...is it not true [they write] that a closer look reveals one of the leitmotifs of May to be the defense of the person against ‘the system’?... we see the repeated insistence that ‘the gears of the system’ be uncovered so as to accuse the system of transforming individuals into ‘cogs in the wheels that guarantee society’s functioning.’”²¹

In the East a Marxist humanist such as Leszek Kołakowski would ridicule the scientistic pretensions of the Marxist-Leninists in power and would turn for inspiration to an earlier Marxism more explicit in its normative commitments to the full development of human creative potential. And the Czechs and the Slovaks attempted to put into practice a more humanistic, less hierarchical and bureaucratic, form of socialism.

For some, the key to understanding the sixties, especially in the United States, was the growth of the human potential movement. Even the New Left, writes Joyce Milton,²² is best understood as a branch of that movement. The great theorist of the human potential movement, Abraham Maslow,²³ developed a humanistic psychology, which

¹⁸ Tucker, *The Philosophy and Politics of Czech Dissidence*.

¹⁹ Józef Tischner, *Etyka Solidarności* (Cracow: Znak, 2000 [1981]); Bożewicz, *Tischner: Poglądy Filozoficzno-Antropologiczne*.

²⁰ Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut, *French Philosophy of the Sixties: An Essay on Anti-Humanism* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990 [1985]).

²¹ *Ibid.*, xxi, quoting D. Cohn-Bendit, “Entretiens avec J. P. Sartre,” in *La revolte étudiante*, 95.

²² Joyce Milton, *The Road to Malpsychia: Humanistic Psychology and our Discontents* (New York: Encounter Books, 2002).

²³ Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*; *idem*, *Toward a Psychology of Being*.

distinguishes deficiency needs, concerned primarily with survival, from growth needs and the need for self-actualization, the maximization of human creative potential. The later surveys of Ronald Inglehart²⁴ suggest that this Maslovian distinction may be the key to our understanding of the cultural transformation, for which the great political and cultural turmoil of the sixties may have been merely an external manifestation.

The underlying more pervasive, but less articulate, cultural shift began to be studied systematically in the late 1960s by Ronald Inglehart. Drawing on the work of Maslow, he developed a scale that captured well this fundamental theme of the sixties. Inglehart called it the Post-Materialist Values Index, but that may be a bit of a misnomer. Respondents were asked (and are still being asked, in more and more countries): "What should be the most important aims for this country in the next ten years?" To be counted as a materialist you needed to rank highly the following: maintaining a high level of economic growth, making sure the country has strong defense forces, maintaining order in the nation, fighting rising prices, a stable economy and the fight against crime. To be counted as a post-materialist, by contrast, you needed to rank highly on: seeing that people have more to say about how things are done at their jobs and in their communities, giving people more say in important government decisions, protecting freedom of speech, progress toward a less impersonal and more human society, and progress toward a society in which ideas count more than money.²⁵

The scale seems not to have that much to do with materialism, but it captures rather nicely the fundamental conflict of the sixties. On one side the realists concerned with survival and security, and hence with stability, machine-like predictability, and order. On the other side, idealists (post-materialist idealists? Perhaps, but certainly "post-realist")

²⁴ Ronald Inglehart, "The Silent Revolution in Europe," *American Political Science Review* 65 (1971): 991–1017; idem, *The Silent Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977); idem, *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic and Political Change in 43 Countries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel, *Modernization, Cultural Change and Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

²⁵ See, for example, Inglehart, *Modernization and Postmodernization*.

committed above all to promote the project of human creative agency, both individual and collective.

The central theme of the sixties, then, from Vatican II to the radical students in France in May, or to the emerging opposition to communism in East Central Europe, was the defense and promotion of human creative agency understood in a multiplicity of ways: human dignity, the person as a creative agent (and not an object to be manipulated and made predictable), or human potential as a potential for creativity. It was in part a protest against science-inspired institutional arrangements (the technocracy that was the enemy identified by Roszak). In part it was also a revolt against the science behind those institutions, and the Enlightenment spirit inspired by this science. It was, in short, a protest against modern forms of technocratic realism.

The Divisive Issue of Limits

The sixties are puzzling in part because they seem so incoherent. There was turmoil, and there were efforts to reform, almost everywhere in the world. But the efforts seem not to have much in common. As I suggested above, I do think there was a unifying theme of fundamental importance: the project of universal human creative agency. But the divisions were deep, and they continue to be deep. On the surface we find obvious contrasts between the early sixties (Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement in the United States, or Vatican II in the Catholic Church) and the late sixties (May '68 in France, student rebellion everywhere, the wild counterculture, women's liberation, gay liberation, and even liberation theology in the Catholic Church), and equally obvious geographic contrasts, between the revolts of 1968 in Poland and Czechoslovakia, in Mexico, or in the rich countries of Western Europe and North America.

But each period and region were internally divided. We remember France in 1968 with its wild near-revolution, and its imaginative slogans scribbled in the streets: "It is forbidden to forbid." After May, France's institutions were only marginally changed. But three years later, without much fanfare, the Constitutional Council of France laid the groundwork for a truly profound transformation of the nature of French democracy by deciding a case invoking the 1789 Declaration

of the Rights of Man and Citizen as if it were enforceable law, and thus making it enforceable law.²⁶ In France of all places, the very France whose Grand Revolution was directed in part against the government by judges, the new form of democracy with a constitutional court enforcing human rights was at hand. The judges (or close to it) were taking power. This was late sixties, in the rich West, but here was the Council overturning a decision of a democratically elected legislature. It had the flimsiest legal grounds: the Declaration was mentioned in the Preamble of the 1958 and 1946 French Constitutions, but no one in their right mind thinks of constitutional preambles as enforceable law. It did have a firmer grounding in principle, and in the new notions spreading around the world of the sovereignty of human rights, based on inviolable human dignity.

And in the United States, we found both a self-limiting movement in favor of human rights (or civil rights) and the wild counter-culture, or the sometimes violent politics of the end of the decade. The divide was neither geographic nor temporal. Then, as now, there were deep divisions in how the project of human creative agency is to be understood. And perhaps the deepest divisions concerned the issue of limits and constraints. On one view, limits and constraints are the enemies of creative capacity: they must be escaped, rejected, eliminated, or smashed. On the other view, limits need to be creatively engaged. Some limits ought to be eliminated, others softened and pushed against. But some limits are also required for human creative agency. We ought to create and discover new and better limits.

We can identify two pure ideal types, two extremes of a spectrum of creative agency. In the first ideal type, revolution is perhaps the best exemplar of human creative agency, and limits are nothing but an enemy of creativity. Here we celebrate liberation of every kind, understanding it as the lifting of as many constraints as possible. We celebrate also, and promote, the revolutionary spirit, taking it beyond the narrow understanding of revolution inherited from the nineteenth century. Revolution need not be directed only against the state or against the capitalist system ("smash private property"); it can and should be directed against all power, and all sources of oppression, which are

²⁶ Alec Stone, *The Birth of Judicial Politics in France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

now seen to be more varied and pervasive, cultural as well as political and economic, encroaching deeper into human minds. Oppressive power is everywhere, and must be smashed everywhere. It distorts not only what we do, but also the content of our beliefs and of our consciousness. We recognize this ideal type above all among the students who took to the streets in Paris, and in other French cities, in May 1968. But certainly we recognize it also in the student revolts elsewhere in the West.

The second ideal type shares with the first a commitment to pluralism, to a decentralized awakening of human creativity, including a political creativity (both intellectual and institutional). It is another formulation of the project of universal human creative agency, supporting a general civic awakening. But within this second type, revolution is not the ultimate in human political creativity. It embodies instead the potential for destructiveness, the dangerous underside of human creativity. The engines of history are not revolutions, but as Gandhi would suggest, renewals and renaissances.

We find some of the best examples of this type either early in the sixties, or in the communist world: Vatican II, the civil rights movement in the United States, the emerging reform and opposition movements under communism. But the transformation of the French political regime by the Constitutional Council I have described above, or the environmentalist movement (with its strong theme of civilizational self-limitation), or the turn to the sacred within the counterculture, also belong here. Creation, according to the first ideal type, involves the escape from, or the destruction of, some limits, constraints, or distortions. Creation, according to the second ideal type, requires us not only to preserve some limits, but also to seek and discover them, to take on some burden or limit. The elimination of *some* imposed limits and constraints is just *one aspect* of what is involved in creative agency. Limits are also limits and foundations of creation. And creation is in part discovery (of the requirements of this burden, and its potential).

What are these self-imposed limits or burdens? We can identify here, during the sixties and since, at least three distinct lines of thought. According to the first variant, the limit is a commitment to a universal principle of equal and inviolable human dignity. It is formulated abstractly in *Gaudium et Spes*, and in preambles to various human-rights treaties and to constitutions. Within such treaties and

constitutions, it is also translated into enforceable provisions. And it is the basis and guiding ideal of many self-limiting social movements. According to the second variant, the limit is a commitment to a responsibility for the world,²⁷ to stewardship for the world, or to a morality of care generalized. Such a self-limiting spirit of stewardship for the world would emerge as the guiding light of the environmental movement, as a “cardinal virtue of ecological economics.”²⁸ It will also emerge in the later struggles of an emerging civic society against communism. The civicness of this civic society did not depend on an idea of citizenship as a form of membership in the state, and it was not a way of bringing new energy to existing democracy. It was, and is, based rather in this obligation to stewardship.

Finally, for the third variant, the limit that enhances the creative potential of humanity is found in the sacred. The spirit for the New Age centers for many on a new seriousness about the sacred, though not a new seriousness about religious hierarchy, or religious authority and religious institutions. Even for participants of Vatican II, that profound transformative event of the early sixties, the event was a triumph of the (Holy) Spirit over the (Vatican) hierarchy.²⁹ But the most representative contemporary expression of the view that takes the sacred as a creativity enhancing limit can be found not in Vatican II documents, but in the popular works of Theodore Roszak, especially *Where the Wasteland Ends*, subtitled *Politics and Transcendence in Post-Industrial Society*.³⁰ It is a book about the sacred dimension of political life, about the energy that a reconnection to the sacred will bring to “the next politics.”³¹ It is an effort to “work out the political meaning of William Blake’s prophetic poems,”³² and to reconnect with the sacred as the great source of human creative potential, and hence of all culture. Roszak concludes:

²⁷ Vaclav Havel, *The Art of the Impossible* (New York: Fromm International, 1998), 112, 222–223, 242.

²⁸ William Ophuls, *Ecology and the Politics of Scarcity* (San Francisco: W.H. Freeman, 1977), 287.

²⁹ Melissa Wilde, *Vatican II: A Sociological Analysis of Religious Change* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007).

³⁰ Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends*.

³¹ *Ibid.*, xviii.

³² *Ibid.*, xx.

...there is another progress... It goes by many names. St. Bonaventura called it "the journey of the mind to God," the Buddha called it the eightfold path, Lao Tzu called it finding "the Way." The way *back*. To the source from which the adventure of human culture takes its beginning. It is this progress which the good society exists to facilitate for all its members.³³

The language and formulation belongs clearly to the New Age spirituality of the sixties, but the underlying thought bears an uncanny resemblance to Weber's hope of a charismatic break in the iron cage of modernity.

The Divided Idea of Democracy

The two ideal types of the project of universal creative human agency mark for us a kind of ideological triangle (one realism, two forms of idealism) which helps us understand the struggles of the sixties, and more generally the struggles of the emerging forms of idealism in the period since World War II. It is worth going deeper into various aspects of this ideological triangle. Consider first the struggle over the nature of democracy. There is a family of conceptions of democracy we might well call realist, and it flourished between World War II and the explosion of idealism of the sixties: Schumpeter's notion of democracy as a competition of elites, Popper's notion of democracy as an open society, or various versions of democracy as interest-group pluralism. The idealist project of the sixties presents us with an alternative we might call democracy as collective creative agency. Our two ideal types, however, have distinctive notions of collective human creative agency.

In the first ideal type the goal is unlimited collective creative agency: the people participate directly in government. The goal is participatory democracy, as it was formulated and extensively practiced in the political movements of the Left in the sixties. Many contemporary deliberative democrats and strong democrats are direct descendants of this aspiration. For them, the more direct the participation the better, and the only legitimate restraints on such a procedure are those

³³ Ibid., 426.

required for the procedure itself to be sustained and to flourish. The institutions of democracy must give a maximum role to direct democracy, with the least possible reliance on formal expertise in any form. There is no room for enforcement of human rights beyond that, or for delegation of powers, or for specialized agencies, or for traditional constitutionalism, with its separation of powers, or checks and balances. It is a conception of democracy the Jacobin lawmakers of the French Revolution would easily recognize: they insisted on the dominance of legislative assembly in all government functions, and on frequent elections. The ideas of strong democracy, participatory democracy, and deliberative democracy can be seen as direct descendants of these political conceptions of the French Revolution.

The second ideal type of democracy as collective creative agency has been less prominent in the manifestoes of the sixties, but it made serious strides in political practice. According to this alternative, the creative agency of the people ought to be restrained above all by the principle of the equality and inviolability of human dignity and human rights. And these restraints go well beyond what would be required for democratic procedures to be sustained. Collective creative agency ought also be restrained by the requirements of effectiveness and efficiency. The characteristic institutions of this idea of democracy are the constitutional court, the specialized independent agency (such as a central bank), or a participatory self-limiting social movement of the kind Martin Luther King led. There is room for direct democracy, but participation is self-restrained, and balanced against institutional embodiments of impartial principle and simple efficiency.

The Divided Idea of Theory

In the sphere of theory we also see an ideological triangle, with roughly the same issues dividing the parties (though admittedly the theoretical divisions do not map neatly into practical ones). There is on one side what for Horkheimer was traditional theory³⁴ and for Maslow “mecha-

³⁴ Max Horkheimer, “Traditional and Critical Theory,” in Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory: Selected Essays* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972 [1937]).

nistic science,”³⁵ identified by a straightforward search for order and regularity in human behavior as in nature. The theories serving the project of human creative agency do not necessarily reject these forms of science (though some do), but they search for an alternative. Again two ideal types suggest themselves. The first is captured well in Ferry and Renaut’s “four essential characteristics of the philosophy of ’68” (they have only France in mind):

- a. The theme of the end of philosophy, expressed mostly by philosophers: The tradition from Plato to Hegel is dead.
- b. The paradigm of genealogy, or of pure critique of ideology: Conscious discourse is to be treated as a symptom. Interpretation must follow what Ricoeur has called the “hermeneutics of suspicion.”
- c. The disintegration of the idea of truth. The ideas of truth as correspondence to reality, or of truth as coherence, are unsustainable. All beliefs are in one way or another ideological. So we also have:
- d. The historicizing of categories, and the end of any reference to the universal.³⁶

The overarching theoretical goal is the smashing of illusions. Illusions of religion have been replaced by the illusions of Enlightenment, but the twentieth century reveals those too to be allies and instruments of tyranny, oppression and exploitation. Human actions, human beliefs, and the content of human consciousness ought to be revealed as a product of class oppression, or of animal impulses of the Id. Marx and Freud are, for the sixties, still the most authoritative guides to the reality behind the illusions. But increasingly we also see the influence of Nietzsche, as well as that of more pedestrian but perhaps more reliable evidence of empirical social science. Human actions, beliefs, and the content of human consciousness must be seen more generally as a product of human structures of power, of structure of mutual influencing and interaction. The autonomous human subject of the kind

³⁵ Abraham Maslow, *The Psychology of Science* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966).

³⁶ Ferry and Renaut, *French Philosophy of the Sixties*, 4–12.

Enlightenment philosophers thought they glimpsed before their eyes is a myth and an illusion, and so are the ideas of truth and universality.

Ferry and Renaut focus their attention on French thinkers—Foucault, Derrida, Bourdieu, Althusser, and Lacan—but the tendency they describe is not limited to France. Still, the most influential intellectual figures do not belong in this group. Who might they be? People like Marcuse and other critical social theorists from the Frankfurt School (Horkheimer, Adorno, Fromm). But also, especially in the United States, Abraham Maslow and the humanistic psychologists of the Third Force, neither behavioral nor Freudian. So we need to construct a second ideal type. Here too the theme of the end of philosophy is strong. It reached even American political philosophy, whose great revival is certainly one of the more interesting intellectual events of the sixties (Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* was published in 1971, and written roughly in the decade before). Rawls turned out to be one of the many philosophers trying to escape philosophy in a philosophical way. Especially in his later writings, he insisted that we abandon philosophical conceptions of justice in favor of political ones.

For non-philosophers the issue of the death of philosophy may not appear quite so urgent (especially as we notice that the damn thing keeps coming back to life). But philosophers seem to think philosophy is dying whenever some set of questions is ready to be transferred to other disciplines. And this does affect non-philosophers. So for example, to answer a broad range of normative questions, which used to be widely regarded as philosophical, perhaps we now need a humanistic psychology (as Maslow thought) or a critical social theory that is loosely a continuation of Marxism. And we then do not need philosophy for this purpose.

This second ideal type of theory certainly distinguishes itself from the Enlightenment tradition, and from philosophy, by taking seriously the genealogical paradigm, or critique of ideology, or the hermeneutics of suspicion, or (in the case of Maslow) both Freudian and behavioral psychology. But theory practiced in accordance with this second ideal type is not content with a hermeneutics of suspicion.³⁷ Within an account of how power distorts actions, beliefs, and consciousness, it em-

³⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970).

beds (or at least attempts to embed) some account of human potential or of social potential. This is emphatically the case with Maslow. It is also in principle the case with the critical social theorists of the Frankfurt School, although admittedly some seem to see remarkably little social potential in the realities of "late capitalism." Theories according to this second view are not simply instruments for the smashing of oppressive illusions. They aim to provide, according to one possible formulation, the rational reconstruction of the conditions of possibility of human emancipation, or perhaps of human creative agency. Theories must be constrained, if I may put it this way, by the truth of human potential, or of social potential. Both truth, in some sense, and aspiration to universality, seem to be significant constraints on theory.

The theories we need, according to this second view, are distinct from Horkheimer's "traditional theory" or Maslow's "mechanistic science." They do more than search for regularities and order in nature, or human action, or society. They search for the potential of the social situation or of the person. If human actions, beliefs, and the content of human consciousness are products of the structures of mutual influences within which we operate, then creative human agency may still be saved if we find that those structures themselves are created and recreated by human agents. We may be ruled by them, as the various critiques of ideology suggest, but we also rule them. In this way we are, with respect to the structures of influence that govern who we are, the sort of agents that fit perfectly Aristotle's definition of a citizen.³⁸ We both rule and are ruled. In the civic spirit we can also reconstruct the goal of the search for truth, which the Ferry–Renaut ideal type of theory abandons. It will not be governed by truth as coherence or truth as correspondence to reality, nor even by the idea of truth as what we would ultimately agree on after appropriate deliberation. To seek truth in the choice of our beliefs would be instead to overcome distortions, partiality, and other impediments (through deliberation, observation, experimentation, and so on) in the service of loyalty to reality.

How can our beliefs be loyal to reality? First, they ought to obey it: we ought to accept the answers reality gives to our questions. In some contexts it may be enough to say with Tarski that "Snow is white" is

³⁸ Aristotle, *Politics*. Trans. Carnes Lord. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), Book III.

true if and only if snow is white.³⁹ But in empirical contexts this would underestimate the difficulty of obeying reality in our beliefs. It might be less misleading to say: "Snow is white" is true if and only if the answer to the question "Is snow white?" is "yes." Some questions reality does not answer at all, others it answers ambiguously. Some it answers quite clearly, but they are still our questions, formulated in our language, reflecting our concepts and our thinking. So obedience to reality does not require the impossible: we do not need to gain some sort of direct access to reality itself, more direct than searching for answers to our questions. But loyalty to reality does require more, on a different dimension. If our beliefs obey reality, we are ruled by it; we are its subjects, not its citizens. A civic loyalty to reality would be different: we would be ruled by it, but also rule it. And in some spheres this appears entirely possible (unless you really do reject all possibility of creative agency), because in some spheres human beings really are creative agents, really are co-creators of reality. Civic loyalty to reality would require that our beliefs obey reality, to be sure. But it would also require that our beliefs help improve reality. This, I take it, was (and is) the aspiration of the various efforts to build theories of human and social potential.

The second ideal type of theory allows for a serious dose of suspicion, but it sees a hermeneutics of suspicion, when practiced by itself, as destructive of the hope and love that are also sources of the strength of human creative capacity. A hermeneutics of creation must, if you like, balance suspicion (identifying distortions, and the instrumental use of beliefs and ideas as well as institutions), and charity (making those beliefs and institutions the best they can be, in the well-known slogan). Traditional theory, in natural science and in social science, aims to identify and explain regularities, and hence among other things it aims to predict. A different type of theory would be more appropriate for a new age emerging in the spirit of the sixties. It would aim, in a somewhat Kantian-sounding formulation, to identify and articulate (and hence to make easier to teach), or "rationally reconstruct," the conditions of possibility of human creation. But the contrast between the possible and the impossible is too stark to be useful for practical

³⁹ Alfred Tarski, "The Semantic Conception of Truth and the Foundations of Semantics," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 4 (1944): 341–375.

purposes. Let us say better that the theory of the new type identifies factors that make human creative agency easier. It does not aim to predict what will happen in a situation, or in the world more generally. It tells us what will make creation and improvement of the situation (or of the world more generally) easier.

Divided Self-Understanding of the Sixties

The different forms of the project of creative human agency are also likely to understand the events of the sixties differently. For those attracted to our first ideal type, it is natural to ask (and people did):⁴⁰ Was 1968 a new 1917? Or 1905? Or perhaps 1848? In short: which other revolution is the closest model? For those attracted to our second ideal type, it is less clear what to ask. For this ideal type we need a different account of the larger patterns of history, which does not see revolutions as the locomotives of history. So we are not inclined to see in the sixties more revolutions. The striking facts of 1968 seem to be distinctly non-revolutionary. There was no revolution in France, though all the conditions were present for one. It was a revolution that did not happen. And meanwhile in the East the idea of communist revolution as a vehicle for human idealism died as the tanks of Warsaw Pact forces rolled into Czechoslovakia.

What we see in the sixties is a groping toward a new program of intellectual and cultural change, and toward a program of institutional change, but a groping very much in the dark (with a great deal of confusion, seemingly random changes of position, and a great deal of immature silliness). We find much violent revolutionary rhetoric, and some serious revolutionary violence (truly massive in China). But there is no mistaking the fact that in the end, the idea of revolution must either be deeply reformulated (the preference of those closer to the first ideal type) or abandoned. Perhaps we see here the early creative struggles toward the next stage of the modern transformation. We should then recalibrate our analogies. The Enlightenment program emerged with some clarity in England in the years 1686–1689, when Newton

⁴⁰ Christopher Hitchens, “Still a Soixante-Huitard,” *City Journal* 18 (2008), no. 2, at www.city-journal.org (accessed February 6, 2009).

and Locke published their path-breaking works, and England established a new kind of political regime in its Glorious Revolution. The Enlightenment, the *philosophes*, and the American and French Revolutions followed. If we are beginning a new stage of the modern transformation, we find ourselves before the period of clarification that would be analogous to 1686–1689. To find an analog to the 1960s, we need some period of temporary but confused idealism in the midst of the seventeenth century (forget about 1848, or 1905, or 1917), a period when hope began to take shape, but in wild and incoherent forms. In some ways we can see in the 1960s similarity to that odd sequence of enthusiasms across Europe mostly between 1612 and 1620 (the Battle of White Mountain), which Frances Yates, its most prominent chronicler, called the Rosicrucian Enlightenment.⁴¹

Such were the sixties: confused, inarticulate, wild and dangerous, full of undirected idealism, and deeply divided. But when seen in the context of what came before and what came after, they were also a period of intense cultural transformation crucial in the development of the new project of creative and civic agency, a slowly emerging answer to the compound of symptoms Max Weber identified as the “iron cage” of modernity.

⁴¹ Frances Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* (Routledge, 2004 [1972]).

AGNES HELLER

The Year 1968 and Its Results

An East European Perspective

One of the fundamental hopes of the silent opposition against communist regimes in Eastern Europe had always been the coming about of a synchronized effort toward reform. In 1968 things did not fare better than usual. Within a bloc of seemingly stable communist system, one could hardly anticipate a transnational, common voice that would challenge their legitimacy. In 1968 things did not fare better than usual. In Romania, the nationalist dictatorship of Ceaușescu seemed to be solidified. In Poland, a chauvinist, populist, and anti-Semitic wave gained momentum, in the aftermath of which almost all the leading intellectuals of Poland chose to emigrate. Still, there was a slight parallel between developments in Hungary and Czechoslovakia that looked promising. In Hungary, the “New Economic Mechanism,” introduced January 1, loosened state control in economic matters and opened up to a degree a space for the market. Lukács, in one of his interviews, greeted this development. He believed, as so many Hungarian intellectuals did, that economic reform could clear the way for political change. This hope was reconfirmed very soon by the developments of the Prague Spring. The political events in Prague, first and foremost, the increasing freedom of the press and speech, pushed the regime towards a transformation of the system in the direction of “socialism with a human face.” Under Dubček and Svoboda, freedom began to escalate. Skeptics soon realized that the Soviet leadership would not tolerate any transformation which might lead—if followed only by one single other country—to the entire collapse of Soviet domination in Eastern Europe. But there was still hope, and rightly so, for in politics contingency reigns supreme.

Travel to the West was then not a frequently granted privilege, except for Yugoslavs and, to a degree, Poles. Yet, those who returned, es-

pecially young people, were highly enthusiastic. Some even brought pieces of barricades as a souvenir. Since Yugoslavia did not belong to the Warsaw Pact, the impact of the Paris May was different there than in other East European countries, and so was its aftermath. In the universities, especially in Belgrade, protest took on the typical form of the student movements in the West. The slogans, the posters, and the demands were also similar. Those movements were suppressed. Still, the reaction to May '68 was different in the Soviet-dominated countries. One should not forget that the movement termed the "New Left," and especially the student protests, was perhaps the first global political movement in history that was not centrally organized or monitored. It spread across six continents and left its mark in places very remote from one another, from the United States to Japan, from Germany to Australia. The global political agenda was, however, connected everywhere to the local agenda: in France to the rejection of Gaullism, in America to the anti-war and civil rights movements, in Japan to the struggle against traditionalism.

In addition, the New Left of '68 was not unitary, but a loose conglomerate of many anti-systemic camps. It encompassed, for example, student protest *sensu strictu*, mobilized against the traditional curriculum, feminist movements, or the struggle for gay rights. There were also projects of self-management and self-organization. Moreover, one could find extreme far-leftist groups, clinging to the bosom of Mao and his Little Red Book, anarchists, hippies, and hobos. Sexual liberation was at the top of the agenda. Drug use became a habit. The common denominator of these very heterogeneous projects and actions was their essentially anti-authoritarian nature and their focus on changing the way of life that developed in the postwar period.

I wish neither to provide a complete balance sheet of the movements of '68 nor to come up with diagnostics of these revolts' fallacies. They were just like several other events in history. They brought about both gains and losses. Since gains and losses were heterogeneous, they cannot be compared. It depends on a person's present position or worldview whether he or she would tip the balance of evaluation in one or the other direction. Sometimes the same movement had a Janus face. For example, the student movements were wholesome insofar as they stood for student participation, yet at the same time they proved to be inimical to the quality of teaching and learning. If one chooses to take the position of democracy, the separation of the wholesome from

the unwholesome becomes easier. Terrorist movements and drug use were the most dangerous branches of the movement of '68, whereas women's liberation, the ideas and practices of participation, belonged to its sunny face. But whatever position one takes today, 1968 changed the world in many ways. Everyday life after 1968 differed from everyday life before that year. The revolution was victorious, yet as happens in the case of all revolutions, it was also betrayed in the eyes of those who cherished grand illusions, good or bad ones alike.

Yet, as far as Eastern Europe was concerned, at least in the countries where the May of 1968 made a real impact, the balance was unquestionably positive. The Prague Spring and the movement in Paris reinforced each other. In the perception of the actors of the Soviet-dominated world, they belonged together. Both were about freedom. Moreover, the May of Paris helped disillusioned actors of some Soviet-dominated states to preserve at least the momentum of some spiritual activity, even after the Soviet invasion to Czechoslovakia. They were able to continue looking for niches of freedom in a world of unfreedom, while drawing inspiration from the movements in the West.

In the following, I take my examples mainly from Hungary, because this is a story I know from personal experience. A totalitarian regime outlaws pluralism. The party leadership decides what is allowed, what is obligatory, and what is forbidden. Political alternatives, be they movements or ideas, are always outlawed. The same is true about cultural pluralism, but contrary to the political field, the space for maneuvering can be both narrower and wider. The Hungarian cultural chief, György Aczél, for example, distinguished among three groups of cultural products: the supported, the forbidden, and the tolerated ones. The territory where the fight between freedom and unfreedom took place was the so-called tolerated space. The question was who occupied the field of the tolerated, what would be the content of the occupation on this field, and finally, how one could widen this field. The party wanted to narrow the field, the opposition to widen it.

In this play between freedom and unfreedom, the ideas of '68 played a very important role. They did in cinema, in music, in philosophy, and in several aspects of forms of life. The ideas of '68 were mainly the ideas of the "New Left." Those who tried to occupy the territory of the tolerated were not all "New Leftist." Among them were also populists, conservatives, or liberals. Nevertheless, those who cherished the

purposes of May '68 were, at least at the beginning, all leftist. And the communist party had far more problems with them than with others.

The communist party claimed a monopoly over the privilege of being the party of the Left. The same privilege was also granted to the so-called brother or sister parties, among them the Italian, the French, and the German parties. Since the New Left movements regarded the so-called official parties as parties of the establishment, "New Leftist" influence in Eastern Europe could not be accepted as leftist. The communists labeled them either right deviationists or far-leftist deviationists, but at any rate, all "New Leftists" were considered dangerous. They were labeled even more noxious for the regime than straightforward political conservatives or populists, for they were seen as competition. First and foremost, both the "New Leftists" and the communists were competing for the soul of the young. And the party bosses could not have had doubts about who was going to get the upper hand in this conflict.

The heterogeneity of the New Left in France, Germany, or Italy was mirrored also in Hungary. Most "New Leftists" were engaged in alternative cultural activities, not without indirect political intent, yet not overtly political in nature. There were also political organizations, even clandestine ones, utterly naïve, like the Hungarian Maoists. There was not much sympathy left between these extreme branches of the New Left. For the Maoists all the others were regarded as liberals, inauthentic in their leftist ideas. For the ones active in cultural movements, the Maoists were perceived as crazy people who wanted to introduce in Hungary a regime far worse than the one already in power. But when the state began to move against them, imprisoning and trying the so-called Maoists, solidarity was displayed despite grave differences in political positions. In the end, after several years, the "New Leftists" and the Maoists met on common ground.

The New Leftists and other characters of the silent civil opposition, that is, those who tried to create alternative cultures in the less-controlled niches of civil life, were mostly aware that their activities, although regarded by the party as dangerous, were just like the prick of the needle on the body of the system. Given that jokes are also pricks of the needle, witticism was at that time at its peak. A joke circulated then about the resistance of alternative culture. "Grün is sitting with his wife at the dinner table. Suddenly gangsters break the door and enter the apartment. They draw a circle in the middle of the dining

room and tell Grün to stand put within the circle. While Grün obeys, they take from the apartment first the silver, then the paintings, and finally the furniture. After they are done, they rape Mrs. Grün. Then they leave. After they have left, Grün bursts out in a fit of laughter. His wife turns to him, horrified: 'Are you out of your mind? You are robbed of all your belongings, your wife is raped, and you keep laughing?' 'But my dear,' answers Grün, still laughing, 'you do not understand! I stepped twice out of the circle!'" Thus, the opposition, while trying to occupy some niches within a totalitarian system for freedom, knew well that they were just stepping outside the circle. Yet, the goal was not to topple the system, but to keep themselves separate, to exercise their moral right to one's own conviction, tastes, and ideas. To be clear: most of the participants did not wish to refuse to appear on a public space; only a few did. Music, theater, film, literature, and theory were the main challengers.

But what has 1968 to do with all this? It has everything to do with it. Communist culture was conservative. Therefore, alternatives to it were by definition anti-authoritarian, rebellious, creative, and novel (at least for Eastern Europe). In quality, they were sometimes far higher than the accepted cultural products, especially the supported ones. But this was not always the case. Sometimes it was just the experience of otherness that generated enthusiasm.

The music of youth culture was up to this point determined by the requirements and the traditions of communist youth movements. It was dominated by marches or by traditional folk songs and folk dances. There was nothing wrong with the quality of the latter, yet they no longer spoke to the young. Now new bands or orchestras marked by the '68ers' experience appeared on the scene, sometimes with very original repertoires. They were looked at with the greatest suspicion by the masters of the official culture. The texts of the songs were never openly political, thus they could not be censored. Yet, even songs about lost love were sophisticated enough to make young people understand what the song was really about. András Kovács even made a documentary film about this particular aspect of the experiences discussed by this article. Additionally, the East German Biermann¹ phe-

¹ Karl Wolf Biermann is a German musician, formerly a dissident under the SED dictatorship. Because of his protest activity Biermann was declared

nomenon needs to be mentioned when it comes to speaking about protest music after 1968. To take another example, Miklós Jancsó began his famous career as a film director earlier than '68, and already in a very stormy manner. His films were sometimes shown and sometimes censored. Yet, the movements of '68 still influenced him deeply. His first film in color, about the Hungarian youth movements after 1947, was only partly historically accurate, yet the gestures, movements, the choreography wore the stamp of the French youth movement. It was in the circle of Jancsó that Hungarian intellectuals got acquainted with the French New Wave cinema, another product of 1968.

The practice of setting up experimental theater in private homes in Budapest became widespread. The audience was recruited from the group of "dissenters." The performances staged in these locations would then become the talk of the city. This type of theater was later termed "postmodern," and rightly so. What was later termed "post-modern," at least in art, appeared on the scene also in the aftermath of 1968. In literature even the wider acceptance of high modernism by the younger generation came after 1968, due to the initial official pressure in favor of socialist realism.

The year 1968 made a great impact also on social theory and philosophy, at least in some of the countries under Soviet rule. I have mainly Hungary, East Germany, and Romania in mind. As I mentioned, Poland's major thinkers had already left the country prior to August 21, 1968, and those Czechoslovak intellectuals who were still able to make their ideas public left immediately after the Warsaw Pact military intervention, or never returned from exile. In addition, no similar transformation of theories and creeds characterized Yugoslav intellectuals, for reasons that are the focus of the present article. There existed even before 1968 a kind of "leftist" and also Marxist theory of critical content. But the late recognition of the impossibility of reforming the system made it also imperative to address issues pertaining to the basic principles on which the communist system was originally

"class traitor" by the regime and later the party leadership deprived him of citizenship. By 1976, the artist immigrated to Western Germany. It should be noted that Biermann's criticism of the regime came from the positions of democratic, anti-totalitarian socialism. [n. ed.] For more details see David Robb, ed., *Protest Song in East and West Germany since the 1960s* (Rochester, NY: Camden Press, 2007).

based. This meant a growing interest in the alternative analysis of the Soviet type of societies, in the critical rejection of some basic Marxian tenets, and, finally, in countering state sponsored and regime apologetic social sciences via sober social research. One example of theoretical criticism is the work by Markus, Kis, and Bence, titled *Is Critical Economy Possible?* This volume argued that the labor theory of value was irrelevant. Or the work by Konrád and Szelényi: *Intellectuals on the Road of Class Power* was smuggled out of Hungary and became famous in the West. Another example of unmasking the fraudulent premises of the regime legitimizing master narrative was Miklós Haraszti's literary work *A Worker in a Worker's State*, in which the author presented the realistic picture of the fate of factory workers under the so-called dictatorship of the proletariat.

All these books, and many others like them, reflected May 1968 too, even if some of the authors (like Markus) have not displayed much sympathy for it. In the last chapter of *Is Critical Economy Possible?* the authors strongly emphasize the positive role of social movements. And Haraszti was very much taken by the idea of collective management and workers' councils. The most obvious example of the connection between the spaces of alternative culture under communism and the Western New Left was that of East Germany. Here Rudi Dutschke's influence cannot be underestimated, as it is clearly demonstrated in the writings of Rudolf Bahro.

At this point it could be considered that ideas such as self-management, worker's ownership of the means of production and the like also belonged to the tradition of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. The memories of the revolution had been buried for more than a decade under severe oppression, yet May 1968 helped them to resurface and again play a role in alternative imagination.

Again, other aspects and tendencies of 1968—together with music, theater, and cinema—influenced the young generation in Hungary and in other Eastern European countries. First and foremost, there was the promise of alternative ways of life. Housing communes were established, common living in the peaceful countryside preferred. Some philosophers (myself among them) also offered theories for the revolution of everyday life. But whether practicing critical theoretical writings, playing music or theater, or adopting new forms of life, all these groups remain somehow connected, and all belonged to the "ecclesia pressa."

They managed to survive and became, a little later, the audience and reinforcers of *samizdat* culture.

The strongest revitalization of some ideas of 1968 came from Poland in the form of the strike in Gdansk and the organization of the Solidarność movement. The “New Left” was at this time generally regarded as a thing of the past in the West as much as in the East. Yet, the Solidarność movement brought back the issue together with its memories. Here was a movement organized against the oppressive state. But its aim was not to conquer state power, but to create a broad space of freedom within it; a space for civil activity. The movement was not organized by a party; it did not even want to become a party, it remained spontaneous. Just as in France in 1968, workers and intellectuals supported each other in a collective manifestation of protest and independence. Several theorists, such as Andrew Arato, understood the Solidarność movement as the revolt of civil society, the constitution of a civil society in a place where it has never existed. I would add to this the fact that Solidarność could be understood as such exactly because of the post-1968 growing interest in theories of civil society (mostly in Europe, especially in England). The Solidarność movement seemed to confirm all the hopes vested a few years later in the ’68ers’ protests.

But Solidarność also achieved something new: the establishment of contacts among oppositional groups on the border of legality and illegality. The desire for contact-building, the mutual help and solidarity, informality and spontaneity, the absence of a center—all these were born out of the legacy of 1968. There would be no flying universities without 1968. And here ends the story about the specificity of the influence of ’68 movements in the countries under Soviet rule. And what comes after is rather a shared history. Many things have changed under the impact of May ’68 and its aftermath. We all know that young couples without a marriage certificate can now live in the same apartment, without shame. We can now dress informally even for the theater. Most universities cannot function without student involvement in administration. All professions are open to women, business and politics included. Gay couples cannot be abused publicly. All in all, after 1968, democracy became transformed into mass democracy everywhere, with a hint of populism. There is no unchecked institutional authority anymore, at least not in democratic countries. Men and women know and can talk everything about their body, but perhaps nothing about their

soul. I could continue the list. But to sum up: everyday life has been radically changed.

Last but not least, I wish to also mention an interesting development which received less attention in the discussion about the consequences and impact of the 1968 “cultural revolution.” I already employed in the present article the coinage of the “New Left” for both what happened at the time in the East and the West. But what one needs to stress here is the “new” part of the story. It is interesting that in one respect this “new” phenomenon also turned out to be the end of something. It ended the hegemony of radical thinking among European intellectuals. From the early twentieth century onwards, European intellectuals, writers and painters included, were enamored with radical thinking and revolutionary movements. The cream of the crop of thinkers, poets, and artists turned to the extremes, like communism and anarchism on one side, fascism and Nazism on the other. Liberalism was normally despised as being pedestrian and apologetic, a position unfit for creative minds. However, slowly but surely, 1968 changed it all. Starting with the 1970s, most intellectuals of the former New Left, together with their sympathizers, became liberals both in the West and in the East. Their attitudes and basic ideas synchronized in an entirely different way than expected. Liberalism transformed into the dominant position. The center was strengthened through the weight of its new converts.

JIRI PEHE

The Prague Spring 1968

Post-Communist Reflections

Various interpretations of the period of political and economic liberalization in communist Czechoslovakia in 1968, known as the Prague Spring, often tell us more about the difficulties of today's Czech Republic in dealing with its complicated past than about the Prague Spring itself. When the fortieth anniversary of the Soviet-led invasion that ended the Prague Spring was commemorated in the Czech Republic on August 21, 2008, politicians, analysts, and historians all struggled with explaining not only what actually happened in 1968, but what the legacy of the Prague Spring should be today.

The main reason for such difficulties lies in the fact that the past—the communist past, in particular—is still approached in a highly ideological fashion. As a result, rather than attempting to explain the meaning of the reform process itself, it was easier for politicians, journalists, and historians to focus on the invasion. This particular event leaves much less room than the reform process itself for unambiguous interpretations, as it was an act of military aggression that violated international law. The invasion can be discussed and critically examined, regardless of what one may think about the reforms that prompted the Soviets to invade Czechoslovakia in the first place.

The reluctance to examine the Prague Spring reforms was obvious during the first half of 2008. There were only a few conferences and very little discussion in the media about various developments, documents, and movements that transformed the first half of 1968 in Czechoslovakia into one of the most important events in the history of the Czechs and the Slovaks, as well as the history of the communist movement.

On the day of the anniversary, an official commemoration of the invasion was organized at Prague Castle. Vaclav Klaus, the president of

the Czech Republic, gave a speech. A Soviet T-54 tank and homemade posters protesting the invasion were on display in Wenceslas Square, where Soviet troops had clashed with the citizens of Prague in 1968. But most leading politicians limited themselves to brief statements.¹

Many leading thinkers in the Czech Republic regarded the anniversary as unremarkable because they believe the Prague Spring was primarily a communist affair—an attempt by reformers to prevail over hardliners within the party. As such, it is of little interest to today’s “authentic” democrats. Articles in the Czech news media argued that leaders of the Czechoslovak Communist Party in 1968, including First Secretary Alexander Dubček, were naïve to think that they could sustain “socialism with a human face.” When they abolished censorship, tolerated artistic freedom, eased travel restrictions, and allowed new civic movements to come into existence, they merely created a virus that threatened the communist system.² More than anything else, such evaluations are a sign that the trauma of communism is still very much alive today, despite the last nineteen years that democracy has had to take root.

In fact, the political thaw that culminated in 1968 started in the early 1960s, when the communist regime eased restrictions on culture. This, in turn, encouraged intellectuals and artists to demand further liberalization. In June 1967, the Congress of the Czechoslovak Writers’ Union became a major political event, where writers like Milan Kundera, Ludvik Vaculik, Pavel Kohout, Ivan Klima, and Václav Havel issued calls for greater freedom. The election of Dubček to the highest party post was partly a reaction to this pressure.

Equally important was the awakening of civil society. A generation of older people who grew up in a democratic Czechoslovakia before and just after World War II joined forces with younger people who were disappointed by Stalinist communism to create a social movement. This widespread renewal of active citizenship, which showed that a majority of people wanted to be free and would pursue their dream, even with the knowledge that the Kremlin would do its best to stop the movement, was the Prague Spring’s most important legacy.

¹ For a more detailed analysis of the commemoration, see Jiri Pehe, “Spring Awakening for Human Rights,” *New York Times*, August 24, 2008. Also, see various reports by the Czech Press Agency, August 21, 2008.

² See, for example, Bohumil Dolezal in *Respekt*, July 28, 2008.

By the end of 1968, Kundera and Havel offered opposing views of the Prague Spring's real importance. Kundera argued that it was a far-reaching experiment in which the Czechs, falling back on the best traditions of their history, attempted to create a new socio-political model of democratic socialism, which would offer a higher quality of democracy, free of various ills associated with capitalism. Havel, who unlike Kundera had never been a communist, offered a more sober view. In his opinion, the Prague Spring was just an attempt to revive the Western-style democracy that Czechoslovakia had once had.³

The discussion on the fortieth anniversary of the Soviet-led invasion also almost entirely ignored the fact that the Prague Spring had a real impact outside Czechoslovakia. The Kremlin's decision to use brutal force to destroy the experiment had a devastating effect on the Eurocommunist movement. After 1968, once-powerful communist parties in France, Italy, and other Western European countries gradually faded. Ideas generated during the Prague Spring were a source of inspiration for Mikhail Gorbachev's glasnost and perestroika in the mid-1980s. Like the Czechoslovak leaders of 1968, Gorbachev believed that a degree of political and economic democracy could be combined with communist rule.

The current tendency in the Czech Republic and Slovakia to play down the Prague Spring is likely caused, in part, by feelings of shame at how easy it was for the Soviet Union to defeat the experiment, and how quickly many people reverted to collaborating with the communist regime. It is not easy to come to terms with the fact that an event that provoked so much hope could be followed by 20 years of oppression and humiliation.

The Prague Spring and the Velvet Revolution

Problems with evaluating the Prague Spring openly started already during the Velvet Revolution, which ended communism in Czechoslo-

³ The literary weekly *Literární noviny*, which played an important role during the Prague Spring, offered during the first half of 2008 a fascinating series of essays by various authors, including several chief protagonists of the Prague Spring, evaluating the polemic between Havel and Kundera.

vakia. The dissident community, which organized itself into a movement in 1977 with the publication of the Charter 77 manifesto, consisted of three groups: former reform communists, anti-communist liberal democrats, and people associated with Christian churches. This division was reflected in the fact that the three spokesmen that Charter 77 regularly elected represented the three above-mentioned currents.

Ideological differences among various ideological groupings in Charter 77 were suppressed during the early 1980s by pursuing a common goal—the democratization of the Czechoslovak regime. There was, however, a latent mistrust between some anti-communist dissidents and former reform communists. Differences intensified, especially after Mikhail Gorbachev's accession to power in the Soviet Union, when it became likely that the communist regime would collapse. While many former reform communists continued to believe that a new political system should follow the Prague Spring's example of "socialism with a human face," liberal democrats and Christian democrats in the dissident community argued in favor of a standard, Western-style democracy.⁴

Such differences were, in fact, reflected in the founding of new dissident groups outside Charter 77, which defined themselves more along ideological lines than as human-rights advocates. Many former reform communists thus decided to join a group called Obroda, while some liberal democrats formed a nascent political party called the Liberal Democratic Party.⁵ Varying attitudes toward the Prague Spring played an important role in this differentiation of the dissident community. The Prague Spring was for many, younger dissidents in particular, a formative experience; in fact, for many, it was the closest they had come to experience any kind of political liberalism. The Prague Spring, therefore, aroused strong emotions even twenty years after its suppression. While

⁴ On various discussions in the Charter 77 community, see *Charta 77: Od obhajoby lidských práv k demokratické revoluci* [a collection of essays from a conference on the thirtieth anniversary of Charter 77], ed. Jiří Suk, Oldřich Tůma, and Markéta Devátá (Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR [The Institute for Contemporary History of the Czech Academy of Sciences], Prague, 2007).

⁵ For a list and agendas of various dissident groupings in Czechoslovakia and elsewhere in communist Eastern Europe, see Jiri Pehe, "A Survey of Dissident Groups in Eastern Europe," RFE/RL, September 1988.

some former communists still saw it as the maximum of what was possible to achieve, if socialism was to remain the dominant social system, liberal democrats argued that the Prague Spring was only the first step in direction of building a real democracy based on Western models.

The chief problem for both communities was a lack of experience with their desired models of social organization. While the reform communists argued that the real potential of socialism with a human face could not be tested due to the Soviet-led invasion, the liberal democrats favored a Western-style system that most of them did not know firsthand. As a result, a large degree of idealization of both desired political systems was present in both camps. It was not clear immediately after the fall of the hardline communist regime in Czechoslovakia in which direction the country should develop. There was much idealism even among former leading dissidents of liberal, non-communist leanings, such as Václav Havel. Although they preferred the restoration of a Western-style democracy, they were critical of some of its aspects, such as tendencies toward bureaucratization and consumerism. Havel and some other non-communist thinkers had also been protagonists of the concept of non-political politics.⁶ Some of those concepts were influenced by the Prague Spring. The concept of non-political politics is, of course, older than some of the ideas developed during the Prague Spring and, in particular, during the 1970s and the 1980s within the dissident communities of Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary.⁷ It was first discussed by the first president of Czechoslovakia, Tomas G. Masaryk, in the 1920s as a "program of socialization of Czechs." In the dissident communities of Central Europe, non-political politics meant a political system which was not predominantly based on political parties and "structures," and in which a civil society would play an important role.

Clearly, "a new kind of democracy, not seen in the history of mankind,"⁸ that some of the chief protagonists of the Prague Spring hoped to develop, was to be based on a civil society much more than on party structures. Seen from that angle, the concept of non-political

⁶ See Vaclav Havel, *Politics and Conscience* (Stockholm: Rowohlt Verlag/The Charta 77 Foundation, 1986).

⁷ See Milos Havelka, "Non-Political Politics: Context and Traditions," *Sociologicky casopis AV CR*, no. 4, 1998.

⁸ Milan Kundera, "Cesky udel," *Listy*, December 19, 1968.

politics was to some degree a legacy of the Prague Spring. In sum, even some of the dissident leaders, who were predominantly in favor of restoring Western-style democracy as opposed to the ideas propounded by some former reform communists, were not entirely free of the intellectual legacy of the Prague Spring. It is often argued that, in the end, the resolute march toward Western-style liberal democracy was decided by the street. We hear again and again that people supposedly did not want to go back to the kind of regime that the Prague Spring had aimed to develop.

It is partly true; yet, in the days between the beginning of the Velvet Revolution on November 17, 1989, and the election of Václav Havel as the Czechoslovak president on December 29, 1989, the question of the ideological underpinnings of the new democracy was not clearly decided. Alexander Dubček, the leader of the Prague Spring, aspired to become president. For many people, he was a better-known figure than Václav Havel. The fact that Havel and his supporters ultimately managed to outmaneuver Dubček played an important role in further developments in the country.⁹

Havel's victory was a victory for the camp of anti-communist politicians, who nevertheless, having been part of the dissident community for many years together with the reform communists, did not have strong prejudices against "the '68ers," as former reform communists are frequently called. In fact, some of those people played an important role in the first post-communist governments. In other words, "socialism with a human face" was rejected at that point as a political system worth pursuing, but the Prague Spring was still discussed with an open mind by many. Former reform communists, who came to play an important role in post-communist politics, fully accepted the rules of the liberal democracy.

In the new system, most of them could be described as center-left liberals. They played an important role in the Civic Forum, the anti-communist umbrella movement that won the first free elections in June 1990. Gradually, however, they were marginalized by people who had

⁹ The most comprehensive account of the Velvet Revolution to date can be found in Jiri Suk, *Labyrintem revoluce* (Prague: Prostor, 2003). See also Milan Otahal and Zdenek Sladek, *Deset prazskych dnu, 17–27 listopad 1989* (Prague: Dokumentace, 1990).

neither a communist past, nor a dissident past, as they were part of the “gray zone” during “the normalization era” between 1969 and 1989. This resulted in a major change of discourse with regard not only to the communist past in general, but to the Prague Spring as well.

Many new politicians who were not known for their resistance to the normalization regime decided to build democratic credentials for themselves by adopting strong anti-communist attitudes. The easiest way for many of them to do so was to lump together various periods in the development of the communist regime, as well as various former communists, without distinguishing among them. Dealing with the past was reduced for a period of time to the practice of screening the people who wanted to work in government agencies and government-run companies for their collaboration with the former secret police. The lustration law, which was adopted by the Czechoslovak Parliament in 1991, was formally aimed at eliminating from the state administration thousands of people who either held high-level positions in the Communist Party before 1989, or who were registered by the communist secret police as agents and informers.¹⁰ On a less formal level, this controversial law, which was criticized by international human-rights organizations as applying the principle of collective guilt, was basically a tool of legitimization for new democrats, in particular on the political right. “Dealing with the past” was reduced to black-and-white categories. The so-called supporters and protagonists of the communists were identified with the help of a law; all others could feel absolved. Unfortunately, this simplified approach extended into judging the communist past in general, which put the Prague Spring into the general category of “communism”—a political system which the Czech Parliament, in a law passed in 1993, declared a criminal regime.

Problems with Communists after 1989

The discourse about the communist past, including the Prague Spring, was not made easier by the fact that the Czech Republic is the only post-communist country in East-Central Europe where a strong com-

¹⁰ See Jiri Pehe, “Parliament Passes Controversial Law on Vetting Official,” *RFE/RL Report on Eastern Europe*, October 19, 1991.

munist party survived the fall of communism. This, too, is—seemingly paradoxically—one of the consequences of what happened in 1968.

After the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, the Communist Party was “normalized,” as the official term goes, by the expulsion of all reform-minded people from its ranks. More than 500,000 liberal-minded communists were purged, and the party was turned into a neo-Stalinist group. While in Poland and Hungary the communist parties underwent a gradual process of “controlled” liberalization in the 1970s and the 1980s, the Czechoslovak Communist Party became an ossified relic of hardline communism, which did not in any way truthfully reflect the meaning of 1968. In fact, the party adopted in 1970 an infamous document called “Lessons from the Crisis,” which became a binding recipe throughout the entire period of normalization for interpreting the Prague Spring as a counter-revolutionary affair.¹¹

When the communist regime began collapsing, the Czech communists were in no position—either intellectually or personally—to transform the party into a democratic-left party. The party was preserved as a home for the old *nomenklatura* and its sympathizers, which, however, meant that it was not able to offer any creative interpretations of the Prague Spring. In fact, most party leaders have remained more or less silent since 1989 on the issue of the Prague Spring. The congress of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in December 1989 rejected the “Lessons from the Crisis” document and apologized to the people who had been expelled from the party in 1970, but those steps did not provoke a real discussion about 1968. The official party line has been that the Prague Spring was a valid attempt to democratize socialism and that the Soviet-led invasion was an “inappropriate” solution, but this evaluation of the Prague Spring is frequently mixed with nostalgic reminiscences about some aspects of communism-building before 1968 and during the era of normalization.¹²

The fact that there is no strong political force in the Czech Republic that would be interested in examining deeply the lessons of 1968

¹¹ *Poučení z krizového vývoje* (Prague: Oddělení propagandy a agitace ÚV KSČ, March 1971).

¹² See an analysis by the First Deputy Chairman of the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia, Jiri Dolejs, delivered at the SPED seminar about the Prague Spring, April 7, 2008. www.sds.cz (Website of the Party of Democratic Socialism).

left the interpretation of 1968 in the hands of self-proclaimed anti-communists. The Social Democratic Party was revived after 1989 outside the post-communist context. Although some of its leading members came from the milieu of reform communism in 1968, most of them do not embrace the Prague Spring as an event important for the post-1989 identity of the Czech Social Democrats.

The Current Discourse

The interpretation of the Prague Spring was left for too long predominantly in the hands of people who perceived their anti-communism in “dealing with the past” as a tool for earning democratic credentials. The fact that a strong, undifferentiated anti-communism was made into a political instrument obstructs efforts to offer a more structured approach. The center-right government of Vaclav Klaus, which in 1992 replaced the government dominated by former dissidents, set the tone for the discussion about the past for many years. The fact that the new political establishment had to struggle with the question of what to do with the unreformed Communist Party did not make matters easier. Although Klaus himself has never been a staunch anti-communist, he nevertheless allowed his followers to define their newly discovered liberal-conservative identity partly by their allegedly strong anti-communist views.

While anti-communist stances that are settling accounts with the period of normalization or the communist terror of the 1950s are generally legitimate, the Czech version of anti-communism suffers from two specific flaws. First, it likes to ignore the fact that collaboration with the normalization regime was widespread and that even people who portray themselves as staunch anti-communists today participated in various communist-controlled rituals. Second, the communist period was not a uniform era and, therefore, describing all periods of the communist era in Czechoslovakia as totalitarian and wholly undemocratic is problematic. The problem with Czech anti-communism is that it is used as a tool of political struggle. The right-of-center parties regularly hoist the flag of anti-communism before elections, accusing the Social Democrats of being too lenient in their dealings with the Czech communists.

A good illustration of conflicting attitudes toward the communist past was a discussion two years ago in the Czech Parliament of the new state-run Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, which was set to acquire and study the communist archives. In giving the institute such a complicated name, lawmakers had to define “totalitarianism.” In the end, they decided that totalitarianism in the Czech Republic included the entire period from the Communist takeover in 1948 to the Velvet Revolution in 1989. But including 1968 in the totalitarian period makes it difficult to explain how it is possible that the Prague Spring produced works of literature, film, and drama more significant than anything the country has produced since the fall of communism. It is also difficult to explain the abolition of censorship, restrictions on travel, or rehabilitations of political prisoners from the 1950s.

Partly because the Prague Spring was included in the totalitarian period, a group of fifty-seven social democratic deputies filed a complaint with the Constitutional Court on December 27, 2007, formulated by a prominent reform communist, Zdenek Jicinsky, now a deputy for the Social Democrats.¹³ The deputies also criticized the fact that the Institute is, in fact, a state institution, whose board is elected by the Czech Senate. They argued that such politicization of history is not permissible and does not contribute to an open discussion. The court in March 2008 rejected the complaint.¹⁴ It was in some ways symbolic, because the ruling that keeps the interpretation of the communist past under the control of a state-run institution relying heavily on former secret police files came 40 years after the Prague Spring began to peak. The debate about this important period thus remains largely black-and-white. The head of the institute, Pavel Zacek, described the Prague Spring as a conflict between two criminal gangs. A slightly more positive description that is common in the Czech media is that the Prague Spring did not amount to much more than to a fight between two groups in the Communist Party, one of which in the end lost.

Other aspects of the communist past are also discussed in an arbitrary fashion. The Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes has made a name for itself by regularly releasing compromising informa-

¹³ CTK, December 27, 2007.

¹⁴ CTK, March 13, 2008.

tion on famous Czechs' collaboration with the communist secret police. The most recent case in point is that of Milan Kundera, who was accused of reporting to police in 1950 a man who was later sentenced to a long prison term. Kundera was described in an article by an employee of the Institute as someone who reported the man to police knowing that the man was a defector from the Czechoslovak army who was hiding in a student dorm. In fact, it turns out, the evidence against the famous writer is woefully feeble. The police report, which the Institute used to implicate Kundera, was written entirely by a communist policeman and bears no signature of Kundera or even his personal ID number. Moreover, it merely says that Kundera, a student living in a student dorm, came to report the presence of an unknown suitcase in the dorm. As a student dorm manager at the height of Stalinist terror, Kundera, in fact, had no other choice after the suitcase was mentioned to him by other students. He could not know whether the information about the suitcase, given to him by fellow students, was not a provocation, especially as he had been shortly before expelled from the Communist Party.¹⁵ All we know, therefore, is that a communist policeman wrote in his report—not signed by Kundera and not listing Kundera's ID number—that a student called Kundera came to report that there was an unknown suitcase in his dorm. This case is illustrative because it shows the difficulties with discussing the communist past, including 1968, in general. Interpretations of this past are often driven by wishful thinking, as is the case with the Kundera affair.

Perhaps it is because dealing with communism is still very traumatic for most Czechs. The invasion ushered in a humiliating period which started with the leaders of the Prague Spring being taken to Moscow, where they were forced to sign the so-called Moscow Protocols, under which more than 100,000 Soviet troops were stationed in the country for an indefinite period. It continued, in the spring of 1969, with the installation of a neo-Stalinist regime led by Gustav Husak, under which all the liberal achievements of 1968 were destroyed. The "normalization" regime that lasted until 1989 was one of the most oppressive periods in Czech and Slovak history.

If the Czechs were willing to discuss the Prague Spring more openly, perhaps they would see that it was a memorable interlude. The

¹⁵ *Respekt*, October 7, 2008.

year 1968 saw upheavals elsewhere in Europe and in the United States, with young people rebelling against the establishment and searching for new models of life. The Czechoslovak experiment was part of that global movement. And like revolutions in the West, it generated ideas that survived—especially its emphasis on human rights. A strong effort was made to build a robust civil society. Today, as the Western world seeks to revive popular interest in the democratic process, this is the Prague Spring's most important legacy.

BRADLEY ABRAMS

From Revisionism to Dissent

The Creation of Post-Marxism in Central Europe
after 1968

After forty years and the end of the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe, we have gained enough distance that we can look back on the tumultuous events of 1968 and their aftermaths and see larger and broader meanings in them than was possible before. My reflections are intended in some small way to explore these broader meanings and contribute to the “Europeanization” of European history, by looking at both sides of a divided Europe. What I will be suggesting is that there are areas after 1968 in which it is possible to conceive of a “European” intellectual history that encompasses sections of both Western and Eastern Europe. The centerpiece of my argument is that critical Marxist intellectuals were deeply affected by the events of 1968, abandoned Marxism in their wake and came, after the Helsinki Accords of 1975, to agree on the significance of several particular themes.¹

Before launching this argument, a few caveats are in order. Above all, I recognize the essential differences between the political contexts of Western and Eastern Europe in the 1970s and 1980s. It is certainly

¹ Since this is intended as food for thought, and the elaboration of these arguments would more than fill an entire volume, I have deliberately kept from extensive footnoting, including notes only to indicate the location of citations. The works cited and a few other books helped me think about these issues. As anyone familiar with the materials will know, these reflections, while having different emphases (and especially in the consideration of both sides of the Iron Curtain), owe a tremendous intellectual debt to the articles by the late Tony Judt cited below, and the many conversation that I had with him over the past twenty years. H. Stuart Hughes’ *Sophisticated Rebels: The Political Culture of European Dissent, 1968–1987* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988) and Barbara Falk’s *The Dilemmas of Dissidence in East-Central Europe* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2003) also contributed heavily to my thoughts.

not my contention that the conditions in which intellectuals trying to map a course to an alternative, non-Marxist vision of progressive politics in Austria operated were similar to those obtaining for an analogous intellectual just across the border in Czechoslovakia. Similarly, it is important to emphasize the wide divergence within the Eastern Bloc itself: in the 1970s Poland was in many, many ways different from Czechoslovakia, and Hungary was significantly different from East Germany. Third, I will be drawing my examples largely from the two Germanies, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland. This should not be taken to mean that these were the only places that shared the themes I will be exploring. All of these themes have lives beyond Central Europe, and some of them have a reach that surpasses Europe's borders. Finally, I will not be arguing that the intellectuals of all of the countries agreed, or even that all of the intellectuals within any given country agreed. Intellectuals, quite simply, *do not* agree, and it would seem a peculiar contradiction if *oppositional* intellectuals, who are the focus of the following reflections, were unusually harmonious.

My argument commences with the tumultuous events of 1968, which I contend were a watershed in European development. The Prague Spring, the March days in Poland, and French, Italian, and German student activism, among others, called into question the domestic quiet of the previous decade. Despite their challenges to the existing order, however, they failed to achieve meaningful political change. Their failure represented the end of certain illusions about the nature and limits of Marxist politics East and West. In the East, in Poland, massive student strikes were put down with force. Among other things, the lack of worker participation in a movement led by revisionist intellectuals showed how little the language of even revisionist Marxism held for the working class. Similarly, the success of the nationalist and anti-Semitic campaign launched by Interior Minister Mieczysław Moczar revealed both that revisionist Marxism was no match for baser ideologies and caused the flight of a number of prominent revisionists. Among these were, most notably, the philosopher Leszek Kolakowski (and his Jewish wife) and the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (also, as they say, "of Jewish origin"). Leading revisionist students, among them Adam Michnik, were expelled from their universities.

The more serious blow in the East was the failure of the Prague Spring. This party-led reform movement had captured the attention

of left-wing intellectuals across Europe, who saw in its “socialism with a human face” a model for a humane and revisionist Marxism. When four nations of the Warsaw Pact invaded Czechoslovakia in August, several things became clear. Above all, it signaled to the rest of the Eastern Bloc that the limits on change were tighter than many had suspected. The only signposts available to reformers were negative ones drawn from the events of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. What had caused the USSR to intervene, it was believed, were the Hungarians’ decisions to restore multi-party democracy and to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact. Because of this, the liberalization in Czechoslovakia was sponsored from above, by a party that never openly discussed the resuscitation of other parties and that issued constant proclamations of loyalty to the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. The invasion showed that real, significant change was not even possible from above, from within the communist party, and led many—including Václav Havel, Adam Michnik and György Konrád—to conclude that communism itself was unreformable.²

Meanwhile, in the West, the youth gave themselves over to a wave of romantic radicalism. In France (and to a lesser extent in Italy), students who had protested conditions at their universities for months went on strike after the closing of the University of Paris – Nanterre on 2 May. After bloody clashes with the police that resulted in 600 arrests, some 30,000 students, under the leadership of Daniel Cohn-Bendit, among others, marched up the Champs Élysées, singing the *Internationale*. Moreover, these strikes seemed to have traction, as well over a

² See, for example, Mark R. Thompson, *Democratic Revolutions: Asia and Eastern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 54. Michnik recently argued that “After this moment of disillusionment [the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia] it was clear to people that you could not reform communism.” In the same article, Lionel Jospin noted that “By then [the time of Solidarity] the idea of reforming communism had been abandoned. In 1968 this illusion died.” See Jiří Dienstbier, Jiří Gruša, Lionel Jospin, Adam Michnik, Oskar Negt, and Friedrich Schorlemmer, “From ’68 to ’89.” *Eurozine Focus*. <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2008-09-03-dienstbier-en.html>. Accessed 13 February, 2009. First published in *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik* 8/2008. Peter Nádas chimes in with his recollection that “I believed—until August 21, 1968, that is—that socialism could be reformed.” See Peter Nádas, “Our Poor, Poor Sascha Anderson,” *Common Knowledge* 8 (2002) 526–547, here 530. These are only a few of the many voices that reached the same conclusion.

million workers came out in support of the students on the 13th. The following day, when Sorbonne reopened, students took it over, just as workers were occupying factories and staging sit-down strikes. By the 17th, some fifty factories had been occupied, and over 200,000 workers were on strike. In the second half of May, France was in a clearly revolutionary situation. However, de Gaulle managed to turn the energies away from mass demonstrations by calling for a general election. This drew away the workers, whose trade unions saw the chance to make electoral gains, whose money was running out in any case, and who had already been offered a general wage increase of ten percent and a rise in the minimum wage of thirty-five percent. In the general election the forces of the right won decisively, at least in part because the French public had turned against the students, the justness of whose complaints had already been recognized by the government. The two rounds of elections held at the end of June produced a Gaullist victory: the right won 394 of the 485 total seats. In short, the revolution seemed to be coming, but did not, not least because the workers accepted higher wages in return for acquiescence. The historian Arthur Marwick ascribes the nascent revolution's failure also to the following:

The basic Marxist belief was that bourgeois society was in a state of crisis, and that a little continuous pressure would bring about its collapse: the revolution would simply take place without the need for precise actions, such as assassinating de Gaulle, blowing up the chamber of deputies, or taking control of the television stations... The violent confrontations had a ritualistic quality... Everybody just piled in with their own particular fads and philosophies, then just left it to happen.”³

In West Germany, the student movement had been fomenting for the better part of a decade. The students' grievances were in many ways similar to those of their French counterparts: the authoritarianism of public life (although the taboo of the Nazi past was uniquely German), the need to reform the university system, and opposition to the war in Vietnam. The German students, among whose leaders was Rudi

³ Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c. 1958–c. 1974* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 614.

Dutschke, had a focal point that the French did not: the *Notstandsgesetze*, legislation that would allow the government to limit civil rights in the case of an emergency, and against the passing of which the German youth militated. Also unlike France, the German youth never gained the support of the working class. The passing of the *Notstandsgesetze* in May marked the beginning of the end for the student movement. The unity of the many small student groups, representing different theories drawn from mostly Marxist revolutionary movements from around the world, fell into disunity, as each blamed the others for the failure of the whole movement. By the end of the year even the SDS (*Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund*), the strongest of all student organizations, was falling to pieces. In short, the French and German youth showed that provocation was no substitute for program,⁴ and their failure indicated that revolutionary activism predicated on the tools of Marxism had reached a dead end in advanced capitalist societies.

The entry of Warsaw Pact tanks in August not only killed the Czechoslovak reform, but coming, as it did, in the wake of the collapse of the French, German, and Italian protests, in a very real way killed European intellectuals' attachment to Marxism. Before 1968 there were many Marxists among the intellectuals of Europe. Though the events of 1956 in Hungary destroyed what Tony Judt called "the consubstantiality of history, party, and proletariat,"⁵ it left intact the language critical intellectuals in the East and West used for speaking about matters political, the language of Marxism.⁶ This had lain at the heart of the movements of the 1960s, as Eastern European reformers tried to rebuild the system by removing what they saw as "Stalinist deformations" and creating a better Marxism that they saw as truer to the founders' intent. The commitment to Marxism also led them to aim

⁴ Paul Berman notes that the American version of the student movement represented a "crazy effort to raise insubordination into a culture," and that "[f] or all over the Western world, the uprisings proved amazingly unproductive in regard to conventional political or economic change." See Paul Berman, *A Tale of Two Utopias. The Political Journey of the Generation of 1968* (New York: Norton, 1996), 10 and 120.

⁵ Tony Judt, "The Dilemmas of Dissidence: The Politics of Opposition in East-Central Europe." *East European Politics and Societies* 2 (1988): 185–240, here 188.

⁶ Tony Judt, "The Rediscovery of Central Europe," *Daedalus* 119.1 (Winter 1990): 23–54, here 35.

their efforts at the Communist parties, which should act as the agents of reform. This was most evidently the case of the Prague Spring, but it was a hallmark of revisionism across Eastern Europe. In the West, Marxism, especially the writings of the young Marx and the Italian political philosopher Antonio Gramsci, had provided inspiration for the “New Left.” To be sure, the cultural rebels of Paris and Berlin went beyond Marxism, but Marxist concerns, such as alienation and the hegemony of bourgeois culture (so central to the revival of Gramsci’s thought), were at the heart of their ideas.

For these intellectuals, then, 1968 mattered more than 1956. What died in 1968 was essentially a political language, as Judt has aptly noted.⁷ Eastern European intellectuals had been engaging since the coming of communism in a dialogue with the party, and now realized that this dialogue, carried on in the language and ideals of Marxism, could no longer be continued. Similarly, the experience of 1968 and the years immediately afterward showed that dissenting intellectuals East and West could no longer ignore their relative isolation from their societies, and especially the working class, an estrangement partly caused by their use of Marxism itself. In this regard, I agree with Leszek Kołakowski that 1968 meant “the clinical death of Marxism in Europe.”⁸ In the East, intellectuals came to recognize that, rather than speaking the language of Marxism to their leaders in the name of socialism, they needed a new language that would allow them to speak to, and to receive feedback from, their societies. In the West, Marxism as the language of revolt had proven too abstruse to rouse the masses, and the invasion of Czechoslovakia had soured the dream of a humane Marxism. With the benefit of hindsight, it becomes clear that a new *non-Marxist* conceptual foundation for progressive political thought had to be created. This foundation had to be able to nourish a critique of bourgeois society (for Western intellectuals) and, as it was called, of “really existing” socialist society (for intellectuals in the East), and simultaneously it had to serve in both cases as a bridge to the wider society.

The following decade proved that finding such a political language would not be easy. From 1968 until well into the 1970s, dissident in-

⁷ Judt, “Dilemmas,” 189.

⁸ Cited in Jacques Rupnik. “1968: The Year of Two Springs.” <http://www.eurozine.com/pdf/2008-05-16-rupnik-en.pdf>

tellectuals East and West each followed one of three paths. In the East, some maintained their use of an increasingly sterile Marxist language in an attempt to keep the dream of a just and humane socialism alive. Among these, of course, were many veterans of the Prague Spring itself. Many others retreated into the private sphere, resigning hope for change. The final group labored on, trying to find a way to approach the communist system critically without relying on Marxism to salvage progressive politics.

The story in the West is in many ways more interesting. There, there were also three prevalent trends. The first of these might be called the path of radicalism. This lumps together several tendencies, but is still valuable, because individuals here might very well subscribe to different of its elements at different times. This includes, first off, those who became members of, aided, or shared intellectual positions with terrorist groups. It sounds a bit odd to use that phrase today, but we need to recall that the 1970s was *the* decade of terror. In Germany the Red Army Faction (known in its early years as the Baader-Meinhof group) committed assassinations, arsons, and bank robberies in a wave of violence that culminated in the “German Autumn” of 1977. In that season, Jürgen Ponto, the head of Dresdner Bank, was assassinated, and Hanns-Martin Schleyer, president of the Employers’ Association, was kidnapped and later “executed” by RAF members. Formed in 1970, Italy’s Red Brigades did much the same thing, most notably kidnapping and assassinating the former Italian prime minister, Aldo Moro, in 1978.

Beyond terrorism, there were many, many intellectuals in the West, and no small number in the East who, seeing that the USSR could no longer serve as the leader of the worldwide struggle, cast their revolutionary hopes further afield. Some became Maoists and placed their hopes in China; others (including the American Noam Chomsky) saw the future revealed in Vietnam or Cambodia (until the genocide could no longer be denied); and some looked to Latin America. Still others fled into “heretical” doctrines that were still close to Marxism. Some embraced Trotskyism (with its doctrine of permanent revolution and the instantiation of a true dictatorship of the proletariat with democratic principles), while others adopted forms of a Luxemburgism (which did not reject trade unions or elections, while criticizing the democratic deficits of both Lenin’s and Trotsky’s actions), and so

on. The majority, however, made their peace with the capitalist welfare state and social democracy. Here must be included the decidedly democratic and moderate Eurocommunist movement driven by the Spanish and Italian communist parties.

The most telling expression of the depth of the rift between the Western European parties and the USSR came in 1976. After many years of strenuous effort, the Soviet leaders managed to arrange a second European conference of communist parties (the first had been held in Karlovy Vary in 1967). The Western Europeans succeeded in passing resolutions stressing the equality and independence of all parties and affirming the right of criticism. The Soviets even failed to gain passage of a final communiqué that (pro forma at these kinds of gatherings) expressed solidarity with all important aspects of Soviet foreign and domestic policies. However, as in the East, there was a third group of intellectuals that sought a new foundation for opposition politics.

What began to emerge in the late 1970s was, however, less a coherent and comprehensive ideology of opposition in Central Europe than a set of themes and issues that found embodiment in a set of organizations. What they shared was a new political language, one that fundamentally accepted the premises of liberalism rather than Marxian socialism, but those of what has come to be called “thick” liberalism, a liberalism that still looks to the state to create harmonies of interests and privileges the sphere of civil society.⁹ The coalescence of these groups of intellectuals, many of whom were political refugees of 1968, began in East-Central Europe after the signing of the Helsinki Accords of 1975. By signing them, the Eastern European communist states opened the door for the formation of many of Eastern Europe’s most prominent dissident organizations. Drawing on the language of rights articulated in the Helsinki Final Act, the Workers’ Defense Committee (KOR) was founded in Poland in 1976 by Adam Michnik and Jacek Kuroń, two victims of 1968. Charter 77 came into being in Czechoslovakia in 1977, followed a year later by the Committee to Defend the Unjustly Persecuted (VONS). In both of these, Václav Havel played a

⁹ Ira Katznelson uses this term in his *Liberalism’s Crooked Circle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), apparently borrowing it from Michael Walzer’s *Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994).

central role, as did Dubček's foreign minister, Jiří Hájek. These movements aimed not to replace the communist parties but to establish a sphere of autonomous action that we know as "civil society." At the same moment in postwar history, the Green movement coalesced in West Germany, expressing a similar autonomous, anti-institutional and "anti-political" politics. By the mid-1980s, they were joined by the East German Initiative for Peace and Human Rights (*Initiative Frieden und Menschenrechte*).

The Helsinki Accords were a crucial turning point in the process of creating a post-Marxist political vision across the Iron Curtain.¹⁰ It was an event whose importance was misunderstood at the time and which is largely overlooked today, even by experts on human rights. The ratification of the so-called "Third Basket" of agreements, concerning human rights, had two crucial consequences. Above all, it provided a new language—the discursive field of rights, the basis of classical liberal theory—in which European dissidents could couch their critiques of their governments. This new appreciation for rights became the foundation for the post-Marxist project, with the task being to harness it to left-wing political goals. The language of rights proved powerful for a number of reasons. As Judt pointed out, "rights de-totalize. They are things possessed by the individual, not the state... They are in their very existence witness to the space between individuals and the state, and are thus constitutive of civil, or bourgeois society."¹¹

Beyond this benefit, the language of rights does not necessarily imply a single political orientation or worldview. In the East particularly, it served as a sort of political least common denominator. It could bring together never-were-communists, ex-communists, and Christian believers in a way few other languages can. The last of these groups is terribly important, for the focus on rights allowed atheist or agnostic leftists to find common ground with Catholics, most importantly in Poland, where Adam Michnik set himself the task of facilitating the mutual recognition that was witnessed in Solidarity.¹² Similarly, the

¹⁰ The importance has been documented in Daniel Thomas' fine book, *The Helsinki Effect* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

¹¹ Judt, "Dilemmas," 192–3.

¹² One fruit of this is Adam Michnik, *The Church and the Left*, edited, translated, and with an introduction by David Ost (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

leftist dissidents and Protestant believers came together in important ways in East Germany, and the Czechoslovak opposition reached out to both Catholics and Protestants. These religious organizations were concerned with a human dignity—think of the many speeches of Karol Wojtyła, Pope John Paul II—that could be seen as embodying the same principles as the language of rights employed by secular leftist humanists. This was important because churches in the East often provided an “umbrella” for meetings of oppositional activists. This was most vividly true for East Germany, but holds elsewhere as well. The second consequence of Helsinki for the East was that it provided for international supervision. The internationalization of the issue served as a spur to Western awareness of developments on the other side of the Iron Curtain, and helped Eastern European dissidents gain, for the first time, a wide audience in the West.

I would like to detour a little bit here, to explain a bit more about why I think that the West “rediscovered” Eastern Europe in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The main factor here was the growth of post-Marxist sensibilities within the Western Left, fomented by the mounting disillusionment with Third World revolutionary movements, and revolutionary Marxism more generally.¹³ If early 1970s Western European radicals cast their revolutionary dreams at what was called at the time the “Third World,” before 1980 they came back to looking at Europe, and what they found was that there were very interesting voices coming from their neighbors to the East. However, there were other reasons for the West’s new interest in the East, reasons that have to do with pan-European developments. First is the East–West détente that grew out of the Federal Republic of Germany’s *Ostpolitik*, which was famously started by Willy Brandt already in 1968. The easing of tensions enabled more and deeper contacts between the blocs, including much more extensive academic contacts, particularly between Hungary and the German-speaking West, and far more interbloc travel.

Second, and related, is the gradual decay of communist power in two senses, both in their willingness to engage in harsh repression and their ability to do so. This can be at least partly linked to the effects of

¹³ On this, see Judt, “Rediscovery,” 34–5, and Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims. Western Intellectuals in Search of the Good Society* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1998).

the 1975 Helsinki accords just mentioned. Increasingly, and particularly after Helsinki Committees were formed across the region, Eastern European governments had to weigh the supposed necessity of cracking down harshly on opponents of the regime, and the bad PR that this would get them in an age where trade with the West (as well as relief from debts incurred there in the first two-thirds of the 1970s) was important. Certainly, by the mid-1980s, the regimes were, in Havel's words, "post-totalitarian," or, in Michnik's, "totalitarian communism with broken teeth."¹⁴ Added to this were technological advances that facilitated communications. The Communist regimes could not commit gross misconduct without everyone knowing about it almost immediately. What this meant was that voices from the region could be heard in the West in a way that they could not have before. Of course they still had to be listened to and, while the Western European Right had always listened (even if they often misunderstood), the trick was to get the Western European Left to listen. Third, I think that it was of serious importance that the future of the European Community, forerunner to the European Union, began to be a very serious issue in the early 1980s. This spawned much talk about what Europe and what being European meant, and raised the specter of the 500-pound gorilla in the room: Eastern Europe.

Western Europeans were also drawn to Eastern Europe for another, cultural reason. Starting in the 1970s, turn of the century Vienna, as the capital of a Habsburg Empire that encompassed much of Central Europe, began to attract sustained attention. By the early 1980s, with the publication of Carl Schorske's *Fin-de-Siecle Vienna: Politics and Culture*, the Vienna of Schitzler and Hofmannsthal, Freud and Klimt had become intellectually chic.¹⁵ Vienna rapidly became the symbol of the modernist heritage, and its artistic and intellectual figures as important forebearers of what had been seen as Western modernity. Moreover, late imperial Vienna came to represent, in shorthand form, the whole area the Habsburgs had ruled. This spawned

¹⁴ See Václav Havel, "The Power of the Powerless," in: John Keane, ed. *The Power of the Powerless* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1985), 23–96, here 27; and Adam Michnik, *Letters from Freedom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 104.

¹⁵ See Carl Schorske, *Fin-de-Siecle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Vintage, 1981).

collateral interest in the empire's other leading cities, with books about Prague and Budapest coming out across the 1980s and culminating with Stephen Brook's 1988 *Vanished Empire*.¹⁶ As Steven Beller has noted, the "realization that a large part of the birthplace of modern thought lay behind the Iron Curtain did make the recognition in the West of the legitimacy of Hungarian, Czech and Polish efforts to escape Soviet domination that much easier."¹⁷

This increased Western interest in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna and the East-Central Europe that came along with it dovetailed nicely with the renewed interest in human rights. Beyond the rather abstract benefits that talking about rights had—in witnessing space for civil society and opening the possibility of alliance with other groups, especially religious ones—it also had a clear political benefit. When Helsinki prescribed certain definite rights, and these were integrated into the legal codes of the Eastern European states, the opportunity to take advantage of the opening became apparent. As Judt noted, citing Petr Pithart, the object was not "to claim some rights as yet unpossessed, but to assert the claim to those already acknowledged. This gives opposition a positive, almost conservative air, while placing the regime on the defensive (or at least obliging it to reveal its own illegality)."¹⁸ Hence the new dissidence found its roots in organizations like KOR in Poland and VONS in Czechoslovakia that were committed to, if not forcing their governments to respect human rights, then at least getting them to admit publicly that they were not going to.

Concurrent with renewed Western interest in human rights in the East, the West began expanding its appreciation of rights. The interest in rights in the West arose most seriously in the question of women's and minority rights, as identity politics began its rise. The modern

¹⁶ Stephen Brook, *Vanished Empire. Vienna, Budapest, Prague: The Three Capital Cities of the Habsburg Empire as Seen Today* (New York: William Morrow, 1988).

¹⁷ Beller makes the argument in this paragraph in a slightly different fashion in the introduction to the collection he edited. See Steven Beller, ed., *Rethinking Vienna 1900* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2001), 1–26. He sees the rise of interest in Central Europe as influencing the intellectual rethinking of Vienna, while I run the argument the other way: the interest in Vienna helped to create contemporary interest in the dissident movement in East-Central Europe.

¹⁸ Judt, "Dilemmas," 192.

women's movement in Europe was born with 1968 and grew rapidly in the 1970s, led by West Germany's *Frauenbewegung*, the largest, most concerted, and most theoretically rich of Europe's movements for women's equality.¹⁹ Ethnic and religious minorities also became more vocal in the 1970s, demanding representation and cultural autonomies that they had never called for before, with Austria passing an important Federal Statute on the Legal Status of Minority Groups in 1976. It should be noted that the issues of minority rights and human rights in the East overlapped in some ways in West Germany and Austria, because of their large *Gastarbeiter* and asylum-seeking populations.

Beyond the shared concern for rights stood at least four other issues: the environment; peace and disarmament; the return of history; and the critique of modern, mass consumer society.²⁰ The issue of the environmental degradation of Central European air, forests, and rivers afforded opposition intellectuals the opportunity to both reach out to broader constituencies and point out the insufficiencies of both their respective governments and economic systems. To be sure, ecological movements existed both prior to the late 1970s and across the European continent. However, two related occurrences make the rise of environmentalism from the late 1970s important. Above all, it was only at this time that the extent of the devastation in the "Triangle of Death" (Northern Bohemia and Moravia, Saxony and Polish Silesia) became more widely known.²¹ The stagnant and dying rivers, the forests stripped of their leaves, and the sight of children trudging to school in surgical masks were visible signs of communist failure, and several Eastern European *samizdat* publications spread the facts as they became known.

For the West, as is well known, environmental destruction respects neither state nor bloc boundaries, and the rising toxicity and

¹⁹ See, for example, Eva Maleck-Lewy and Bernhard Maleck, "The Women's Movement in East and West Germany" in Carole Fink, Philipp Gassert and Detlef Junker, eds., 1968: *The World Transformed* (Washington/Cambridge: The German Historical Institute and Cambridge University Press, 1998), 373–95.

²⁰ Judt addresses some of these for East-Central Europe in much the same way in "Dilemmas," 206–12 and 218–22.

²¹ Interestingly, the 1979 film version of *All Quiet on the Western Front* was shot in northern Bohemia, since the landscape closely resembled that of war-ravaged northeastern France.

frequency of acid rain in the German-speaking West as a result of the burning of brown coal in the East was a source of concern for West German and Austrian intellectuals, as well as calling attention to the rising environmental costs of their states' own domestic industrial advancement. It is these circumstances that prompted the coalescence of Green politics at precisely this time, most famously in West Germany. Growing out of the *Bundesverband Bürgerinitiativen Umweltschutz* (1977), the Green Party was founded there in 1980 and secured parliamentary representation three years later. It should perhaps come as no surprise, within the context of this essay's larger argument, that veterans of 1968 Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Rudi Dutschke were both on the rostrum at the founding of the party. The Austrian Greens followed suit, founding two parties in 1982 that united in 1986, and, after the popular potential of environmental issues became apparent, Eastern European dissident groups began to pay increasing attention to them. In Hungary, the "Danube Circle" was born in 1984 with the intent of halting a dam project on the Danube, and Charter 77 and East German activists also increasingly called attention to ecological issues. The East German environmental movement grew out of the state-sponsored "Society for Nature and the Environment" (*Gesellschaft für Natur und Umwelt*).

While nascent post-Marxist thinkers could all easily agree on human rights and environmental protection, serious divergences, both between East and West and within each group, arose when peace and disarmament became important again. Although official and unofficial meditations on the division of Europe and the danger of nuclear conflagration were a recurring theme throughout the years of the Cold War, NATO's announcement in 1979 that it intended to deploy nuclear missiles in West Germany sparked renewed discussion. With its proposal NATO provoked not only the members of more than 300 West German peace groups, but also of the newly born Green Party. The issue reached fever pitch in the "hot autumn" of 1983, when millions of West Germans participated in peace demonstrations before the right-center majority coalition voted in the Bundestag in favor of the missile deployment.²²

²² See Jeffrey Herf, *War by Other Means: Soviet Power, West German Resistance and the Battle of the Euromissiles* (New York: The Free Press, 1991).

Here the desires of West German (and Austrian) dissenters for disarmament or a nuclear-free zone in Central Europe along the lines of the Rapacki Plan—a plan, presented by the Polish Foreign Minister in October 1957, that called for the denuclearization of Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the two Germanies—aroused the mistrust of many of their analogs to the East. While the Hungarian György Konrád's famous book-length essay *Antipolitics* stands as a testament to the resonance of anti-nuclear and pacifist views, even he refused to endorse any equation of the respective dominance of the United States and the Soviet Union on "their" halves of the continent.²³ Václav Havel's critique of Western pacifism in "The Anatomy of a Reticence" is even more pointed. In the essay he objects to Western calls for unilateral Western disarmament and notes that

Without free, self-respecting, and autonomous citizens, there can be no free and independent nations. Without internal peace, that is, peace among citizens and between the citizens and their state, there can be no guarantee of external peace. A state that ignores the will and the rights of its citizens can offer no guarantee that it will respect the will and the rights of other peoples, nations, and states... [R]espect for human rights is the fundamental condition and the sole, genuine guarantee of true peace... A lasting peace and disarmament can only be the work of free people.²⁴

This was a point that was also made by dissidents in East Germany, who increasingly criticized the militarization of their society after the regime's 1978 decision to introduce compulsory military education into the schools, and particularly after the initiation of the *Friedensdekaden* in 1980.

My third theme is the return of history to the political and intellectual agenda. In the decade between 1978 and 1988 each of the states, with the exception of Hungary and East Germany, also experienced a significant debate over its past, and I do not just bring these up because

²³ György Konrád, *Antipolitics: An Essay*, translated from Hungarian by Richard E. Allen (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1984).

²⁴ Translation by the noted philosopher Erazim Kohák available at the official Havel website: http://www.vaclavhavel.cz/showtrans.php?cat=eseje&val=4_aj_eseje.html&typ=HTML.

I am a historian. These debates included the *Historikerstreit* (the Federal Republic, 1986), the Waldheim Affair (Austria, 1985), a rekindling of the debate over Polish-Jewish history and the Holocaust (particularly from the mid-1980s), and a debate over the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans (Czechoslovakia, beginning in 1978). These shared more than just chronological commonality, however. They reached heights of acrimony unseen for decades, and they all centered around the events and aftermath of World War II, a particularly contentious period across Europe, but especially so for Central Europe. In each case alternative-minded critical intellectuals criticized their own nations, and particularly the deleterious effects of their nation's nationalism.

Further, there was a shift, in both the East and West, away from systemic critiques of capitalism and communism, and towards a more general critique of mass, consumer society and its power over the individual, one that bears a more than passing resemblance to other post-modern critiques. This does not, however, mean that these Central European intellectuals abandoned their criticisms of the systems under which they lived. What it does mean is that they recognized that the highly developed welfare states of Western Europe were no longer paragons of capitalist exploitation, and the socialist governments of the East were no longer the Stalinist states of the 1950s. Though the differences in emphasis here are notable, the similarities are as well. The social systems East and West were each taken to have penetrated the minds of individuals, who were perceived as having to learn to think outside of internalized categories. In the West, this drew on a clear heritage from 1968, and particularly the writings of Herbert Marcuse and his *One-Dimensional Man*, while in the East, Václav Havel most eloquently began this thread of criticism in his "Power of the Powerless" (1978) and the one-act play "Private View" (1975). The theme quickly took up spiritual overtones (as in Petra Kelly's involvement with Buddhism, or Havel's musings on the Absolute, and his sympathy with the Dalai Lama). In all cases, these were critiques not just of the reformed capitalist and socialist systems, but of the way in which power is manifested in society.²⁵

²⁵ Havel worries that the consumer society developed in both East and West has weakened individuals' integrity, speculating that in this way the East may stand "as a kind of warning to the West, revealing to it its own latent

One final observation concerns the interest in reviving the idea of a Central Europe itself, which came in the wake of Milan Kundera's famous 1983 article "The Tragedy of Central Europe."²⁶ There certainly were good practical reasons why notable Germans, Austrians Czechs, Slovaks, Poles and Hungarians would be interested in fostering the belief in a unique Central European space. Beyond those, it was the very process of creating a post-Marxist political project that made the resuscitation of Central Europe possible, and almost necessary. If we ask why the intellectuals became interested in creating a region that they called "Central Europe" in the 1980s, I would argue that, given the realities of superpower politics, Central Europe became, as the Italian cultural philosopher Claudio Magris put it "a metaphor of protest—against Soviet rule in Eastern Europe and against the American way of life in Western Europe."²⁷ From the viewpoint of the early 1980s, with Ronald Reagan, Helmut Kohl and Margaret Thatcher in power, the future for left-wing politics did not look bright in the West. In the East, Brezhnev, Husak, Kádár, and Honecker seemed the embodiment of sclerotic resistance to change. Given these conditions, many European left-wing intellectuals were indeed interested in creating a Central Europe, not just for nostalgic reasons, but also as a location onto which they could project their political hopes in those dark times. They desired a place that contained all the multiethnicity and toleration that came from a rosy view of the Habsburg Empire, that could overcome the division of the continent (and the world) into nuclear-armed blocs, and onto which they could project their political dreams of a more environmentally friendly, less nationalistic and far less consumerist society than the ones they called home. "Central Europe" fit this bill very nicely.

tendencies." Václav Havel, "The Power of the Powerless," in John Keane, ed. *The Power of the Powerless* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1985), 23–96, here 39.

²⁶ This is the title of the essay as it appeared in *New York Review of Books* (26 April, 1984): 33–8. Kundera's article was originally entitled "A Kidnapped West, or the Tragedy of Central Europe" ("Un Occident kidnappé ou la tragédie de l'Europe centrale,") in *Le Débat* in November of 1983. See Milan Kundera, "A Kidnapped West, or Culture Bows Out," *Granta* 11 (1984): 95–118; and, more broadly, George Schöpflin and Nancy Wood, eds., *In Search of Central Europe* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble, 1989).

²⁷ Cited in Ivor Neumann. *Uses of the Other: "The East" in European Identity Formation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 149.

In conclusion, 1968 was an important year, and in the subsequent decades the impulses of that year achieved considerable gains in all kinds of cultural aspects. However, its failures achieved as much as its successes. It created an environment in which intellectuals East and West were forced to rethink their attachment to Marxism, and what came out of this rethinking was a set of concerns for a progressive politics that spanned the Iron Curtain and are still with us today. Whether this was a good or a bad thing for the Left can be debated, of course, since the broad concerns, while related, do not add up to a meta-narrative with the power of the market or the nation (often employed by the Right) or the Marxism that was sacrificed. Nonetheless, the achievement should be noted. The realignment brought new categories to the fore, and created a context for progressive politics that is flexible enough to address the concerns of the twenty-first century.

TEREZA-BRÎNDUȘA PALADE

*Post-Marxist Mentality
and the Intellectual Challenge
to Ideology after 1968*

Was Marxist ideology seriously challenged after the disenchantment with Marxism in 1968? Or instead, did the latter yield only an anti-ideology and new versions of the Left that still convey the *forma mentis* of Marxism?¹ In trying to provide an answer, I shall first try to clarify what I mean by a Marxist mentality. For this purpose I will explore the idealistic and utopian roots of Marxist ideology and attempt to examine the structure of radicalism that is intrinsic to them. Then I shall briefly recall Aron's liberal critique of Marxist radicalism ("fanaticism") and Kołakowski's moderate attempt to come to terms with utopia, while dismissing at the same time an ideological *forma mentis*.

How is it possible to move towards a de-radicalized post-ideological mentality and to create a post-Marxist *forma mentis*? In the final part of the paper, I shall deal with this question by considering both the Marxist and the anti-Marxist radical mentality.

Philosophical Ideas and Ideology

In his *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* (1909), Lenin argued that every philosophical theory serves the interests of a certain class, regardless of the awareness of the philosophers themselves as to which interests they are actually sustaining. So, according to Lenin, all philosophical ideas have an immediate ideological significance. Lenin's argument relies on the principle of "partisanship" (*partiinost*), which means that

¹ I am grateful to Jeffrey Herf and Charles King for their thoughtful comments and helpful suggestions to an earlier version of this paper.

every philosophical question is only an instance of the “basic question” of philosophy, i.e. the materialistic or idealistic tendency of every theoretical view, and that there is no philosophical neutrality with respect to the class struggle.² The same thesis of the impossibility of a classless knowledge was also maintained by an orthodox Marxist like Kautsky.

The consequence is that no disinterested pursuit of truth would be possible. Every philosopher or theorist is either politically involved, as an ideologist of the party, or else is an insincere idealist or a fideist. In all fairness, the Marxist original view did not develop, to the same extent, such a doctrine of “partisanship.” Marx believed that socially committed philosophers who interpret the world by articulating the consciousness of the proletariat transform at once their interpretation into political action; so there is, roughly speaking, a tendency of theorists to support the interests of a certain class. Yet, historical materialism was developed by following Hegelian lines, which meant that even a bourgeois philosopher like Hegel may have some valid insights that can result in the development of a materialist philosophy which serves the interests of the working class. And Marx’s debt to the Hegelian idealistic philosophy was, as I shall argue later on, even more important than a mere structural influence which has been transmitted to his own philosophy of history.

So one may conclude so far that according to a Marxist view of politics and philosophy, philosophers who do not want to become hypocritical idealists or fideists must join a sound political group and become its ideologists. But, as I shall argue, the statement that only such an *a priori* epistemological commitment can allow a philosopher to grasp “reality” is instead based on idealistic premises.

Hegel’s philosophical Self wished to reproduce in each individual, at a rational level, a perfect visionary intelligence. This intelligence was able to create a coherent dialectic of history that was entirely abstract and purely logical. With this *a priori* vision over history, the philosopher could have met reality, but only in order that the latter would confirm precisely that vision of history.

² *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* vol. 5, in V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, 45 vols., Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1960–1970, vol. 14, 286.

So Hegel did not have any interest at all for reality, but only for the way in which this reality can be subjected to his abstract concepts. The knowledge of reality was thus entirely dependent on the *a priori* ideas about it; moreover, at the end of the day, even the existence of real things and the occurrence of real events depended on the “oracular” vision of Hegel’s. So there could not possibly be any knowledge of reality without an *a priori* concept. Now, in Marx’s philosophy of history this *a priori* concept is altered and transformed into ideological commitment. But the idea that there is no possibility to pursue a quest for truth without an *a priori* viewpoint has an idealistic origin.

Marx also inherited from Hegel the idealistic spirit of subjective certitude and the devotion to system-building. Again, the founder of historical materialism seems to have been largely inspired by an idealistic tendency to reify subjective truths into absolute concepts that are the mental embodiment of truth. Thus Hegel’s subjective certitude as regards the philosophical system was converted by Marx into a strong belief in the predictability of social science.³ Adding to the structure of Hegelian historicism the lure of positive science, Marx claimed that he possessed a final and necessary “historical truth.” Unlike Hegel, he wanted to use this finding in the service of all mankind, which in his view was best represented by the interests of the working class. Philosophical ideas thus became the material of an ideology. Disinterested philosophical ideas, aimed at the quest for truth, were no longer possible.

This point is crucial, however, because it shows how, without an initial realistic grasp of an object of knowledge, philosophy, and especially an idealistic philosophy based in a radical way on *a priori* ideas, can be easily turned to the service of an ideology. The *a priori* commitment to the interests of a class is but a modified, politically altered version of an *a priori* concept of idealistic philosophy.

At the same time—and this is one of the paradoxes of Marxism—there is a large tendency in Marxism to mistake materialism for epistemological realism. In other words, although Marxism clearly relies on an *a priori* ideological commitment, it claims objectivity and thus pretends to give an accurate account of what there is. Of course, if materi-

³ See also K.R. Popper, *The Open Society: The High Tide of Prophecy; Hegel, Marx, and the Aftermath*, vol. 2 (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), 105–106.

alism were identical to epistemological realism, as Kołakowski pointed out in *Main Currents in Marxism* (1978), “nearly every Catholic philosopher is a materialist”⁴ by believing in an objective material reality that is independent of the subject. And, to reverse this conclusion, nearly every materialist would be a Catholic philosopher.

To sum up, Marx’s historical materialism depends on a simplified version of idealism. Philosophy can grasp the truth only if it is subjected to an ideology. In this sense, Marxism, especially in its crudest versions of Leninism and Stalinism, has overcome the Scholastic ancillarity of philosophy to theology, which did not pretend to subject to the same degree the faculty of natural reason to the revealed truths.

Marxist Ideology: Political Religion and Messianism

Marx did not remain, however, only a philosopher of history: he wanted to change it. So, from a philosophy of history nourished by Romantic humanism and utopian socialism, Marx moved not only to technical political economy, but also to the professing of a dangerous political ideology. Of course, Marx believed that he had discovered not a political ideology with idealistic and utopian roots, but the very scientific truth related to the necessary evolution of social and economic history. His *a priori* position on the side of the proletariat was the very warrant of the infallibility of historical materialism, because he considered this class a messianic one. So, being the conscious, prophetic voice of this class, he was at the same time the voice of human history, as the working class was both the subject and the object of history. That is to say, Marx claimed to bring a new revelation, or a new secular religion.

But what can explain the particular appeal of this new religion, especially to intellectuals? In his classic liberal analysis of the lure of Marxism for intellectuals, *L’opium des intellectuels* (1955; *The Opium of the Intellectuals*), Raymond Aron gave an account of the way in which, at the beginning of the twentieth century, many intellectuals sought a new religion that would be compatible to some degree with the tradi-

⁴ L. Kołakowski, *Main Currents in Marxism: The Golden Age*, vol. 2, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 722.

tional Judeo-Christian faith. They were thus longing for prophecy and for a new, secular messianism. Besides the Romantic-humanistic spell of Marxism, this religious fascination may account, according to Aron, for the fervor of the French *intelligentsia* for the new Marxist secular revelation.

However, as Aron pointed out, as the Marxist ideology became the doctrine of the Bolshevik party-church, it yielded more and more the mentality of a sect, and not that of a universal church. It was more similar to the obstinate and fanatic mentality of the isolated religious groups than to the openness of a religion that would be meant “to all nations.” After the “death of God” that was proclaimed by Nietzsche in the late nineteenth century, many intellectuals naturally sought to invent a new kind of religion that would successfully replace the ancient dogmas. Communist orthodoxy was the most appealing candidate for this new religion of mankind, since Marxist ideology seemed to play very well the function of the lost traditional religion, in an era in which belief in science had replaced the former belief in a transcendent being.

As political religions did in the pre-Christian world (in the Roman Empire, for example), the political religion of Marxism has played the role of legitimizing a system of power. And, as Kołakowski remarked, an ideology is a system of principles and beliefs that has precisely the social function to legitimize a certain system of power.⁵ That system becomes “trustworthy,” as one that possesses and administrates the “absolute truth,” by the ideological transformation of one aspect of the truth or of a partial truth into the whole truth. In the case of Marxism, it is of course equality that is isolated and converted into the absolute truth of *egalitarianism*. By replacing a complex system of values with one single value that is eventually seen as “absolute,” a system of power that imposes forcefully that single value may be implicitly legitimized, as a sound political entity. This was precisely the way in which the communist ideology was used by Lenin in order to legitimize the dictatorship of one single party.

⁵ This definition is used by Kołakowski in his article “Why an Ideology Is Always Right.” This article, as well as some others referred to in this paper, was published in Leszek Kołakowski’s volume *Modernity on Endless Trial* (1990). I use the Romanian translation, *Modernitatea sub un neobosit colimator*, trans. Mihnea Gafita, (Bucharest, Curtea Veche, 2007), 329–330.

And the Marxist political religion did even more than legitimize a party: it created and successfully maintained a system of power. Now, both the utopian egalitarianism, seen as an absolute requirement of a just and perfect society, and the political religion of Marxism have created a specific mentality: Marxism was at the same time a utopia, a compelling, yet dangerous political ideology and a new messianism.

In *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), Marx and Engels blame the early utopian socialists (Saint-Simon, Fourier, Owen, Cabet, and so on) for *planning* in a utopian vein the future of society, while ignoring the material conditions for a radical social change and the social laws to create such conditions.⁶ Of course, Lenin and the other Bolsheviks neglected as well, in underdeveloped Russia, “the material conditions for a radical social change” and hence for a successful proletarian revolution that would have followed the orthodox Marxist doctrine. In 1917, the Bolsheviks thus managed to transform what an orthodox Marxist would have called a bourgeois revolution in Russia into a would-be proletarian revolution. The Bolshevik revolution thus betrayed the Marxist expectation for the ripeness of the material conditions or for the moment when class conflict has become critical, given the advance of the technical progress under capitalism. In doing so, the Bolshevik Party displayed an anxiety to rely only on its own church energies and was rather indifferent to the expected aid provided by a messianic history, as was recommended by Marxist eschatology. Real history, of course, has proved more complex than the simplified picture created by the Marxist ideology and by Marx’s historical messianism.

But was this simplified political ideology and messianism deeply challenged after 1968? Did the complexity of history reveal itself sufficiently in order to convert the Marxist faith of intellectuals into a more realistic outlook of history? Furthermore, could this process result in the beginning of a de-radicalization process? These questions will be tackled in what follows. But, before that, I intend to pursue my attempt to clarify the specificity of the Marxist *forma mentis* that could (or should) have been subjected to a challenge after 1968.

⁶ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, transl. Samuel Moore (London: International Publishers, 1886; reprinted, London, Martin Lawrence, 1933). I refer here to the Romanian translation edited by Cristian Preda, *Manifestul Partidului Comunist* (Bucharest: Nemira, 1998), 41–43.

The Marxist Utopia

Marx and Engels claimed that, unlike the utopian socialism, only their genuine version of the proletarian socialism was entitled to claim an epistemological monopoly over truth and history. Yet, Marx himself put forward, in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (1875), for example, the principle “to each according to his/her needs.” He thus envisaged the prospect of a utopia even more radical than that of his “unscientific” predecessors, one in which all social antagonisms would disappear. This original utopia of Marxism, related to a future, perfectly just society, had always remained the final aim of scientific socialism.

The *forma mentis* of Marxism thus accommodated in some respects the early modern utopian ideal of establishing a perfect society on earth through an extreme rationalization of life. Of course, according to Marxist utopianism, this kind of perfect society is not a *utopia*, a place which does not exist. It can be achieved by the revolutionary proletariat who may turn what seemed to be a social dream into political reality. This “utopian nostalgia” that moved from the realm of fantasy to the future of mankind became, arguably, the humanistic dream of at least one generation of intellectuals in the first half of the twentieth century. Not only the quest for a new religion, but also the millennial expectation of a paradise on earth may explain the appeal of Marxism. And it seems to be correct to suppose that, after the disillusionment with Marxism of many intellectuals after 1968, that dream should have been abandoned.

Yet, there is another aspect of Marxism that seemingly proved even more difficult to dispense of, namely the primacy of historical negation, which was due to the Hegelian dialectic. The dialectical method involves the idea that movement, a process, or progress, is the result of a conflict of logical opposites. In its application to socialism and communism, this method means that none of them could be built up without a permanent struggle with all the remnants of the bourgeoisie. The *forma mentis* of Marxism, created according to Hegelian lines, thus necessarily involves conflict and contradiction: a just society could not emerge without *denying* all the injustices of the past. As most utopias, the Marxist one uses, therefore, the device of reversing what is unjust and inconvenient in the status quo: the communist society is but a *ne-*

gation of the bourgeois one. This aspect is particularly important for the issue of deradicalization, because it shows how difficult it might be to change the mental habit of asserting something *per se*, instead of simply *denying* another element.

Due to this dialectical principle of *negation*, Marxist utopia has overcome in terms of radicalism and political intensity any other previous progressist utopian plan of a new, model of society (for example, Owen's and Fourier's schemes for new forms of political commonwealth). Moreover, since this structure of dialectical negation is established, the idea that the perfect society will be constructed only after a revolution seems to be quite correct—though, again, it only depends on an *a priori* concept.

Although the idea of “a perfect society” seen as a definitive stage of history belongs to the utopian genre,⁷ neither early modern utopias nor the progressist utopias of the nineteenth century depend on the outcome of a social revolution, which can be logically justified by a progressist vision that relies on the principle of negation. Because of its historicist vision, Marxism can also sustain a prophecy. As Karl Popper remarked, Marx regarded history with historicist and positivist eyes, believing that historical science would have some objective laws that might allow him to postulate a perfect historical knowledge. That knowledge would not only apply to the past, but would also account for the future, i.e. it was to be a predictive scientific knowledge, or a knowledge of the future. And this social prophecy of historicism became more persuasive as a sociology of knowledge that could make accurate predictions related to the future of mankind.⁸

⁷ In spite of the attachment of many Marxists to the idea of a non-utopian Marxist social and historical science, *The Communist Manifesto* could be rigorously classified as a piece of work that belongs to the utopian genre. The most comprehensive *Utopia Reader*, edited by Gregory Clayes and Lyman Tower Sargent (New York and London: New York University Press, 1999), thus includes *The Communist Manifesto* among the utopias of the nineteenth century.

⁸ See Karl R. Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, vol. 2, 199–211.

Perfect Equality

As we have already seen, the main feature of the perfect society that must result from the dialectic of history is that it will realize a perfect equality. In the final, millennial stage of communism, that equality must be based on the communization of property and on the principle “to each according to his/her needs.” As in most utopias, other values like liberty or personality, like many of the traditional moral values, are denied. Again, we may come across the same principle of negation: since so far societies have been unjust and unequal, we may only build a perfect society by *denying* them altogether and by constructing a logical opposite, i.e., a new society of equals. This equalitarian society is not a fiction, since it belongs to the very consciousness of the proletariat, and thus to the future.

One may remark that Marx completely annihilates the “subjective” individual conscience and replaces it with the objective class-conscience of the messianic proletariat. For Hegel, the subjective individual conscience needed to gather the universal, in order to become objective. In Marx’s simplified view, the subjective conscience of the proletariat already *is* objective. Consequently, the narrow bourgeois conscience must be thoroughly replaced with the class conscience of the working class.⁹

Perfect equality thus seems to be the absolute value of the Marxist utopia. Of course, in order to arrive at this value, one needs the same *a priori* standpoint of the proletariat. Only the proletariat can isolate equality and transform it into the key value of the future society (the French Revolution, for example, only associated equality with freedom and fraternity). The egalitarian principle formulated from the proletarian standpoint can by no means be only a partial truth, given the messianic character of this class. Yet, if this messianism of the proletariat is removed, the whole scenario appears to be only an idealistic construction based on arbitrary overstatements, following the very “technique” of ideological thinking. As for the alleged predictive science of Marxism that allowed for the inevitability of the collapse of capitalism to be foreseen, this is based on the same millennial prophecy, rather

⁹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 30–31.

than on scientific observation. After showing in his *Capital* that capitalism could not avoid contradictions, Marx passes to the direct prediction that these contradictions would cause it sooner or later to collapse. But this vision seems to be, once again, constructed only according to the standpoint of the proletarian wish for perfect equality through the abolition of capital. It was thus the social idealism combined with prophecy and with a dialectical method that made possible the Marxist predictions. All of these elements have an *a priori* character. From this mixture of idealism, prophecy and the dialectical principle of negation was created the Marxist mentality.

The Secular Millennialism of Marxism

Marx's utopia has also been called a secular version of the unorthodox Christian millennialism that was, during the Middle Ages, the outcome of fundamentalist and quietist movements in Western Europe. Norman Cohn, for example, in his book *The Fanatics of the Apocalypse* (1957), has found in the Marxist movement all the key elements of a millennial uprising: the rebellion inspired by a prophet is carried out with the substantial aid of the masses which are driven by egalitarian dreams and phantasms of prosperity.¹⁰ In addition, the classless society, which is projected as the greatest achievement of the progress of mankind, is somehow similar to the millennial kingdom that is meant to last for one thousand years at the end of history.

This progressist emphasis of Marxism thus seems to rely primarily on a millennial structure. Again, the prophecy of Judeo-Christianity seems to be adapted in order to justify the coming of a new secular messianic era. Yet, what is hijacked from Judeo-Christianity is not an established meaning of prophecy and the Millennium. Millennialism, in its militant apocalyptic mass-expressions, was never officially accepted by the Church. These movements were associated with minor forms of religiousness, rather than to the institutionalized mainstream of the Christian religion. As Simone Weil observed, Marxism can qualify as a

¹⁰ Norman Cohn, *Les Fanatiques de l'Apocalypse*, translated into French by Simone Clémendot, with the collaboration of Michel Fuchs and Paul Rosenberg (Paris: Julliard, 1962 [1957]), 298.

religion only if it is seen as an inferior form of religion (based on credulity and superstition), which serves, as Marx himself stated in his *Critique of the Hegelian Philosophy of Right*, as "the opium of the people."

Of course, the Marxist utopia conceived in progressist and millennial terms¹¹ is the prophecy of a secular kind of religion that was intended to liberate human beings from all social injustices, including the so-called domination of the Church. But the means to be used for this purpose were rather minor or secondary from a genuine religious point of view. Such means, which rely on irrationalism, credulity, and naïve abandonment, are usually supposed to transform people into fanatic proselytes. And, indeed, when the party-church in Lenin's Russia has expressly limited Marxism only to a sectarian movement, it became clear that the secular religion of Marxism, like all millennial movements, was not apt to convey an universalist message and to rely on other means than credulity and fanaticism.

The prophecy of Marxism related to the final happiness of the communist society of the future was indeed inspired by apocalyptic or millennial visions, even if no existence of a transcendent deity that guides the history to an end was posited by Marx. Marxist utopia thus qualifies for a secular millennial or apocalyptic story of the end of world. Since Marx did not posit any divine rule over history, the whole history is for him, as for Engels, guided to a final emancipation from all the hostile forces that may prevent the victory of the proletariat and the establishment of a communist society.¹² So Marx does interpret history as a providential history. Still, one may ask, what is the providence that may guide Marxist history? Could it be the working class? By no means, because this social class has, according to Marx, a clear historical form and an immanent, material existence. Since the working class cannot be seen as transcending the history of mankind, it cannot guide it providentially. Could it be the party, according to the Bolshevik creed? Not at all, since the party too has a historical shape and an immanent existence.

In Hegel's philosophy of history, the human spirit that is looking for self-knowledge and freedom is, as it were, "the agent" of the pro-

¹¹ See also Karl Popper's assessment of the "historicist prophecy and oracular irrationalism" of Marx's doctrine in *The Open Society and its Enemies*, vol. 2, 224.

¹² *The Communist Manifesto*, 32.

cess of self-development throughout history. According to the Hegelian dialectical method, the human spirit arrives at a certain historical form of consciousness, that is a concept, or a “thesis,” as it has been called. But the human spirit later realizes that the “thesis” is only partial: it gives rise to a logical opposition, or a conflicting concept, that has been called an “antithesis.” Then the logical conflict between these two concepts make possible a new form of consciousness, which is a third concept, or a “synthesis,” that may overcome the conflict. Yet, in its turn, the “synthesis” becomes a new thesis, and the dialectic of negation starts all over again. So the human spirit develops itself, unfolding with it the process of historical development, and moving towards its final aim. In this reading, history is but a process of self-knowledge of the mind, which is also seen by Hegel, in his *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (1807; *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, 1910), as pure Thought or Spirit. The confusion between mind and reality becomes overwhelming.

Nonetheless, in Marx’s dialectic, that Spirit takes only the form of a process of class-conscience development, and it ceases to be “an agent” of history. The conflicting generation of new forms of consciousness remains, but it ceases to rely on a reified concept of “pure Thought” or “Spirit.” Thus Marxist providential history seems to be guided only by its own intrinsic historical laws. Yet, if it were so, history must have an immanent self-given direction: it must be a kind of self-driving history. But there is, however, a driving force of Marxist providential history, namely progress, and especially technical progress, that brings about changes in the class structure, which can further determine the reshaping of political institution and of the dominant ideology. So the intrinsic force of Marxist history and the key element of his secular millennialism is progress. This notion of progress, however mythological it may appear to be, sustains the whole millennial prophecy of Marxism. Progress replaces the need for a transcendent agent that “moves” history towards its end. It is the immanent force of humanity that creates and underlies all historical development.

To sum up, it is progress that supports Marx’s millennial dream and sustains the prophetic structure of Marxist secular religion (I will come back to this issue later in this paper). The notion of progress provides logical means for the fulfillment of the prophetic scenario of Marx’s: devotion to progress may replace devotion to a transcendent deity.

Marxist Utopia after 1968

In 1968, the heritage of Marxism in Eastern Europe was a failed political theory and a historical dystopia which was seen as inspired by the Marxist egalitarian political ideology. In Eastern Europe, 1968 has marked, *inter alia*, the moment in which revisionism of the official communist utopia was turned into open criticism. After being excluded from the Communist Party in 1968, the Polish former Marxist philosopher Leszek Kołakowski undertook a large critical research on Marxism, whose main result was his elaborated treatise, *Main Currents in Marxism*. Nearly all the ideological, political, and philosophical grounds of Marxism were carefully examined and rejected.

The communist system in Eastern Europe did indeed last long after 1968. Still, the beginning of open dissent in 1968 was an outstanding event in the Eastern European countries, where a petrified submission to the party rule and to the Soviet Union had prevailed. One may remark, at the same time, that 1968 has carried, especially in Czechoslovakia, a large social and political expectation of emancipation that was similar in structure to the idea of revolution posited by Marxism, although in content it rejected the millennial promise of Marxism. Since this content is more important than the structure, one may say that the first thing to be rejected in Marxism was the eschatological promise of a communist paradise on earth. After decades of terror, famine and political mystification, in Czechoslovakia and Poland, many former Communists were ready to scrap most of the conventional truths of Marxism.

The Prague Spring, especially, seemed to be, if not a victory over Soviet communism, at least an attempt to disrupt the system and to reject the communist *illusion* (as it was termed by François Furet). The liberalization promoted by Alexander Dubček as “socialism with a human face” was supported by a belief in the possibility of successful reforms. These reforms too seemed to reject the most radical millennial dream of communism. Of course, they were suppressed by the Soviet invasion in August 1968 and by the sudden occupation of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact troops. But the conditions of the possibility for the denial of the Soviet system and of the Marxist doctrine were set in.

In Eastern Europe, many former leftists began to reconsider the promises of Marxist utopia. As I will argue later on, this reassessment of Marxism may not have led to an “end of the ideology” or to an overnight de-radicalization of former Marxist intellectuals. However, from that moment on, Marxist utopia started being openly and unabashedly rejected by many leading intellectuals. There is a broad list of outstanding Eastern European intellectuals who have openly rejected the Marxist utopia after 1968: Leszek Kołakowski, Jacek Kuron, Václav Havel, Milovan Djilas, Milan Kundera, Paul Goma, György Konrád, Alexandr Zinoviev, and many others.

In what follows, I will consider the question of whether this rejection meant only the criticism of a particular utopia, or also supposed a more far-reaching rejection of the Marxist *forma mentis*. In order to clarify the nature of the process of de-radicalization, I will discuss in the following sections of the article Aron’s liberal critique of radicalism and Kołakowski’s critique of both radical utopianism and extreme skepticism.

The Liberal Critique of Radicalism

In his book *L’opium des intellectuels*, as in other writings on fanaticism and prudence, Aron sketches what he calls “a critique of fanaticism.” He refers to the fanaticism generated by the sectarian loyalty of the party-activists to the new secular religion of Marxism. Aron describes the common “true believer” of the Soviet system as one who knows that he/she belongs to a small number of elect, who lives in a safely closed system, in which all history and all his/her life have a meaning, who is proud of uniting the past with the future through the current action, who is able to keep faithful and serene despite the daily erosion of his faith due to the Machiavellianism within the party, who lives for a cause and does not recognize the humanity of the fellows who do not belong the party.

This type of fanaticism, based on total loyalty to the party, is, according to Aron, typical for the political formations which strong ideology is postulated as absolutely true and which dogma announces a radical break in history. It is, as we may remark, the same messianic truth possessed by a class or a party and the same principle of nega-

tion that are typical, as we have seen, for a Marxist mentality. However, this quasi-religious devotion to the secular church-party, which, according to Aron, can emerge only when people are taken away from their natural environment, has lost its *raison d'être* for many Eastern European communists, after 1968. The "superiority of fanaticism" was in many cases replaced by dissent and by a growing skepticism with regard to the orthodox Marxist faith. What Aron calls for passionately in his *L'opium des intellectuels* is precisely the doubt in utopia and ideological models that actually rose later on in Eastern Europe after 1968, up to the point to which, in 1983, Kołakowski called in turn for a sort of moderate renewal of utopia.

Kołakowski's Warning: The Disappearance of Utopian Mentality

In a 1983 essay, "The Death of Utopia Reconsidered," Kołakowski claims that the utopian mentality started fading away after the failure of the Marxist utopia, even within leftist communist ideology. According to Kołakowski's wider analysis of culture, there has been a general decline of the utopian mentality not only in politics, after the general disillusionment with Marxism in Eastern Europe, but also in philosophy. He thus describes Descartes's and Husserl's epistemological utopia as the philosophical dream of finding a perfect certitude and a definitive human transcendental foundation of knowledge, with no attempt to lay that foundation in religion and in the divine truth. He proceeds by pointing to the failure of this transcendental utopia in contemporary philosophy and to the fact that the disappearance of the utopian mentality in both politics and philosophy resulted in a growing skepticism. The latter, however, may in turn involve a risk of stagnation.¹³

Kołakowski thus argues that during the eighties the utopian mentality not only failed to provide any viable political or philosophical scenario, but that it disappeared altogether.¹⁴ The utopian mentality was based on the idea that a perfect society imagined by the human mind

¹³ *Modernity on Endless Trial*, 190–197.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 198.

could be implemented only by human endeavor and that a definitive, perfect condition of life or of knowledge could be reached with certainty, thus rendering superfluous any further responsibility. Of course, as the history of the twentieth century has proved, this mentality is not merely innocent, when it comes to drawing policies of repression in order to establish a harmonious “perfect society.” If utopia is seen as the worthiest goal of human politics, it may favor the design of institutions that can “legitimately” enforce the utopian creed.

But the total disappearance of any utopian mentality is, as Kołakowski argued, equally undesirable. He believed that some utopian ingredients of social and philosophical thought should remain, even if the utopian mentality as such is ill-founded. Thus, in Kołakowski’s view, both the utopian and the skeptical mentality are undesirable in themselves, but, for reasons of moderation, their presence in a normative equilibrium is still desirable.¹⁵ And it is precisely this equilibrium between ideals, on the one hand, and the liberty of critical reflection, on the other hand, that seems to open the way to a post-Marxist, post-utopian mentality which may avoid legitimizing other oppressive institutions, while at the same time preventing a fall into the passivity of skepticism.

A similar opinion was advocated by Kołakowski in a 1982 lecture at the Radio Bavaria, “The Intellektuellen” (“The Intellectuals”).¹⁶ He claimed that after so many awful mistakes, intellectuals have become more cautious with regard to any political commitment. They have thus become more reluctant to embrace the ideologies of the day and more inclined to withdraw themselves in the narrow, but secure, area of specialization. This is, Kołakowski concluded, the reason why nowadays we lost not only the fanatic and the malignant people, but also the intellectuals who might be able to guide us in politics and in other areas of life.¹⁷ If there are no leading politically involved intellectuals anymore, and if the vocation of rightly “talking about” things is going to be abandoned, then today’s ideologies may be left uncriticized and are thus more likely to be exploited by politicians, economists, and others. Some of the “utopian spirit” of the intellectuals that may fuel their

¹⁵ Ibid., 206–209.

¹⁶ Ibid., 51–67.

¹⁷ Ibid., 64–65.

involvement with current political debate is therefore needed—even if we have good reasons to refrain, together with Aron and other liberals, from encouraging yet more radical intellectual involvement with politics.

Kołakowski's argument in favor of a guiding intellectual presence in politics does not omit a necessary prudence towards the well-known failure of intellectuals in relation to dangerous totalitarian ideologies. Too often in history intellectuals have sustained the cruelest tyrannies and have intoned totalitarian creeds. Too often they have become the ideologues of a system of power or a crown court. In the United States, for example, at the end of the sixties, leading democratic students from Harvard, Columbia, and Chicago were singing the slogans of Sino-Soviet totalitarianism. Their enchantment with communism not only involved being charmed by the philosophical theses of Marx and Engels, but also pushed them to give clamorous support to the politics of Mao Zedong. And Kołakowski himself, as yet another illustration of the intellectuals' erraticism, was once a supporter of the "people's democracy" of Stalin.

Avoiding the Extremes in Kołakowski's View of Post-Utopian Politics

After the failure of the utopian mentality that has nourished the Marxist creed, Kołakowski searched for moderation, especially after 1968. This quest for moderation expresses in some respects an Aristotelian-like *forma mentis*, shaped by the quest for an intermediate position between two extremes, an excess and a deficiency, that could be found by a *recta ratio*. Kołakowski thus tries to see not only if the Marxist utopia could accommodate a totalitarian ideology, but also if the values of a liberal open society, after being consistently applied, could not lead as well to totalitarian institutions. He thus seems to question also the right of the openness of a modern society to become an absolute value and an *a priori* standard, which could be coherently imposed by a yet another kind of totalitarian order.¹⁸

¹⁸ Ibid., 233–237.

In an article published in German in 1979, “Selbstgefährdung der offenen Gesellschaft” (“The self-poisoning of an open society”), Kołakowski examines the way in which an open society may become self-destructive and eventually degenerate into totalitarianism. This article also illustrates Kołakowski’s distance from an utopian and ideological mentality in general. The failure of the Marxist ideology and utopia drives him to challenge entirely what I called the Marxist mentality, i.e., an ideological *forma mentis* based on subjective and partial ideals that could subversively justify an “absolute value” imposed in a totalitarian way. As he remarks, given the intrinsic optimism of the liberal theory, the potential risk to transform liberal values into absolute self-sustaining values was rather understated by most liberal philosophers (except for classic liberals like Mill and Tocqueville, I believe).¹⁹ Not only the “absolute truth” of Marxism, but also the truths of a liberal open society, should therefore be critically examined, in order to see if they could not, once isolated and overemphasized, be likely to legitimate repressive institutions.

Kołakowski thus suggests that a consistent application of the liberal principles of an open society may eventually lead to their very opposite. If the principles of the free market, equality of opportunity, and liberty were applied without limits, as an indefinite openness may suggest, an absolute openness of the free market may lead to monopolies that destroy the original principle of liberty in competitive economic conditions; an absolute equality of opportunity may result in an uniformization of the life-conditions of all the members of society; an absolute liberty can yield an anarchic disorder whose only possible *débouché* is a totalitarian order. An open society may thus survive, according to Kołakowski, only if it tolerates some values that are obviously inconsistent with the ideology of democratic openness (such as tradition, authority, intolerance towards those who threaten democracy, and so on).²⁰ In other words, after the bitter lesson of Marxist ideology, Kołakowski believes that an open society may survive only if it does not isolate partial truths, transforming them into absolute values that could subversively re-establish totalitarianism. A passage from absolute

¹⁹ Ibid., 234.

²⁰ Ibid., 238–248.

Marxist egalitarianism to absolute anarchic libertarianism, for example, is not the most desirable end of a post-Marxist society.

A Post-Marxist Mentality

But not even Marx is more precious to us than the truth.

Simone Weil

In Eastern Europe, many former Marxist intellectuals who shared before 1968 the humanitarian and Romantic vision of a future communist society became sincere liberal-democrats. Many of them blamed passionately the inner injustice of a regime shaped according to the Marxist doctrine. Especially after the official disclosure of the “errors” of the Stalinist era by Khrushchev in the Soviet Union and by Dubček in Czechoslovakia, critical awareness to the dangers of the Marxist illusion was increasing. In Eastern Europe, this liberal-democratic anti-ideology became the platform of the newly emerged liberal-democratic dissident movement.²¹

However, if a post-Marxist mentality is to be conceived, it should be based on something more than a simple anti-ideology that is articulated only as the opposite of Marxism. Such a difficult task would also involve the critical (and perhaps also the self-critical) commitment of the Western Left, which started, from 1968 on, to embrace Marxist ideology, as opposed to capitalist liberalism.

What Kołakowski seems to bring to the post-1968 debate over the failure of Marxism is precisely an attempt to move from a mere anti-Marxist ideology to a more refined, de-radicalized mentality. However liberal and democratic this mentality may be, it supposes a capacity to critically examine and discuss political principles and convictions. This post-Marxist mentality, which is also post-utopian and post-ideological, is thus less prone to embrace uncritically and fanatically a political ideology.

In his article “Why an Ideology Is Always Right” (1980), Kołakowski distances himself from every ideology with universalist

²¹ See Vladimir Tismaneanu, *The Crisis of Marxist Ideology in Eastern Europe: The Poverty of Utopia* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

claims, arguing that, in order to survive, such an ideology always needs a technique of deception. The double-conscience of the faithful believer in an ideology, which has also been analyzed by Czesław Miłosz, is described by Kołakowski as a necessary deduction of the would-be *real* facts from the norms of propaganda.

If we take, for example, the statement “The Soviet person does not steal,” we should not read it as a moral principle which guides human conduct, as we read the statement “A Christian does not steal.” The former statement was rather meant to conceal through misinformation the fact that in the Soviet Union almost everyone actually stole. The party that created this propaganda was infallible, so that, if some facts were incoherent with the ideology, they were supposed to be wrong. As Kołakowski points out, this parallels Fichte’s idealistic principle that if facts contradict the “whole knowledge,” then it would be worse for those facts.²² If we extrapolated the former example, one may imagine even the conversion of the statement “The liberal person does not violate human rights” from a moral norm into a necessary truth.

Soviet ideology was thus, arguably, based on an idealistic replacement of all the logical and ontological criteria of truth with the *a priori* absolute knowledge uniquely possessed by the working class—that is, by the party-church. According to Kołakowski, this is the last epistemological consequence of the communist ideology and of every ideology with universalist claims. The party seen as the unique possessor of a truth that is revealed, not by contemplation, but by political practice, is the greatest invention of the Marxist-Leninist self-justifying ideology.²³

Now, after the “end” of such an ideology with universalist claims, the road to a post-ideological and a post-Marxist mentality seems to be open, perhaps also by restoring the valid logical and ontological criteria of truth. But what could be the post-Marxist mentality that Kołakowski seems to be aiming at in his critical stance towards the Marxist ideology and utopia?

First of all, from what has been said in this paper, it seems to emerge that a post-Marxist mentality should reject idealism as a trustworthy epistemological principle. In a liberal-democratic society, the individual subject may freely and legitimately have his/her particular

²² *Modernity on Endless Trial*, 329–337.

²³ *Ibid.*, 339.

views and ideals, but those views are not to be allowed to transgress all our empirical, logical, and rational knowledge about reality and to pass for the absolute truth. Subjective truths are not to be credited as ultimate metaphysical principles.

Secondly, a post-Marxist mentality should be more than simply anti-ideological, or based on a negation of the former ideology (according to the same principle of negation of the Hegelian dialectic), while sharing at the same time the ideological *forma mentis* of what it rejects. In order to be post-Marxist indeed, it should be rather post-ideological. In other words, it should tolerate critical reflection and contemplative theory (and humor, too). If a declared anti-Marxist strongly denies orthodox Marxism in order to assert, say, radical versions of anarcho-libertarianism, a radical utopianism still nourishes his/her radical ideology in ways that do not depart from the Marxist mentality. A post-Marxist attitude should instead encompass a realistic attitude and the disposition to adjust theoretical principles if reality proves more complex than they might assume. In short, a post-Marxist mentality can adopt political principles only critically and reflectively.

Of course, the seductive potential of ideologies is still strong after the rejection of orthodox Marxism and the doctrine of historicism. The intellectuals who were previously on a quest for a new millennial religion may have found new versions of radicalism to rely upon, either in East or in West. In Eastern Europe, during the two post-communist decades, many intellectuals actually fell victim to hybrid authoritarian creeds other than Marxism.²⁴ Thus they embraced new versions of nationalism, corporatism, elitism, and so on.

In the West, on the other hand, in current political theory for example, if one is criticizing liberal individualism, he/she is usually classified from the outset either as a communitarian or as a socialist feminist; if he/she says something critical about the New Left, he/she is surely a conservative or a libertarian. Such a classifying attitude seems to be alien as well to a reflective post-ideological and post-Marxist mentality. Kołakowski has satirized it in an 1978 article in *Encounter*,

²⁴ See Vladimir Tismaneanu, "Învingători sau învinși? Intelectualii și lupta pentru demnitate morală în Europa de Est" (III), in *ID*, Bucharest, no. 10 (49), October 2008, 53.

"How to Be a Conservative-Liberal-Socialist: A Credo"²⁵ and in a short pamphlet "The General Theory of Not-Gardening," published in the *Journal of Anthropological Society of Oxford* in 1985, where he demonstrates that gardening is wrong from the perspective of Marxism, psychoanalysis, existentialism, structuralism, and analytic philosophy.²⁶

Thus, in both East and West, a post-Marxist *forma mentis* seems to be little widespread at present in the academia and the intellectual world, and the tendency to follow some new ideological promises, and to constrain political reflection to correspond to the structures of our most familiar ideologies, still prevails. Once more, reality seems to be the greatest annoyance and the less familiar thing to intellectuals. A post-utopian and post-ideological mentality is, as I suggested by following Kolakowski's analysis of the fortunes of utopia, consistent with a certain quest for moderation directed by *recta ratio*. This is not to be confused, on the other hand, with the pragmatist trimmer model of Lord Halifax that looks for stability by trying to avoid "the best that is the enemy of the good." Nor it is identical with a Rawlsian consensus, which abstracts itself from controversial comprehensive moral positions, although it may have some affinities with the Rawlsian procedure of reflective equilibrium (seen as a prudential reasoning, although in the classic sense of prudence, and not in the utilitarian sense avoided also by Rawls).²⁷ According to Aristotelian ethics, prudence has to do with moderation and with a knowledge of the circumstances of the action, not in order to sustain a pragmatic interest, as in the case of the trimmer, but to help the moral agent to attain the chief good of a human life.²⁸

A post-ideological mentality would thus be consistent with a philosophical attitude of enquiry, with a quest of the underlying principles of human action, with a critical understanding of the current cultural and political values, and with a rational struggle with the most valuable questions of human life—in short, with a genuine quest for truth. This inquiring mentality is precisely what the Hegelian idealistic system, the

²⁵ Ibid., 323–326.

²⁶ Ibid., 341–343.

²⁷ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, revised ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 18–19.

²⁸ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, translated and with an introduction by David Ross, revised by J.L. Ackrill and J.O. Urmson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 142–154.

Marxist oracular philosophy of history, and his political ideology have tried to eradicate.

The Problems of Marxism as a Successful Political Religion

As Raymond Aron has pointed out in his *L'opium des intellectuels*, communism was the only political religion created by intellectuals that was quite successful—although it was not the first secular religion ever devised by intellectuals (of course, there were also Auguste Comte's and Saint-Simon's previous efforts to put forward a substitute for an universal religion). Aron's argument is in many ways reminiscent of Norman Cohn's analysis of millennial movements. In Aron's view, what uniquely qualifies Marxism as a successful political religion, whose pattern is similar to the Christian religion is its would-be eschatological structure of prophecy. Actually, this structure of prophecy related to a secular Millennium was not taken directly from the Christian dogma. The intellectual history of this transition is far more complex, starting from an Italian Cistercian monk, Joachim of Fiore, who developed a theology of history and was declared a heretic by the Church, and going through Lessing, Schelling, and Auguste Comte to Hegel. The latter developed his well-known philosophy of history in his *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte* (1837; *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, 1858).

Although there is not a clear analogy between Joachim of Fiore's theological doctrine of three stages of history, each of which would represent one person of the Holy Trinity, and the Hegelian philosophy of history, which regards history as a rational progress of the human spirit towards the consciousness of freedom, there is, arguably, at least a history of influences between the two.²⁹ But whatever its intellectual history may have been, the prophetic structure of Marxism lies on a secular eschatology and on a millennial devotion to progress. The latter, seen as the intrinsic force of history that drives it to the millennial

²⁹ See Henry Mottu, "Joachim de Flore and Hegel. Apocalyptique biblique et philosophie de l'histoire," in *Storia e messaggio in Gioacchino da Fiore* (San Giovanni in Fiore: Centro di Studi Gioachimiti, 1980), 145–160.

end envisaged by Marx's vision of the future, supplies in the Marxist secular religion the role played by the transcendent God of traditional religions. Of course, a deity as such does not exist for the progressist believer, who is necessarily an atheist. But a faith does exist, having as an object the impersonal yet magic force that propels the historical development, i.e. the icon of progress.

Now, as Aron has suggested, this faith in progress is necessarily a radical one. If Christian theology can make sense of postponements in the fulfillment of prophecies, since many prophecies aim at a trans-historical dimension, the Marxist theology, whose prophecy is confined only to the history of mankind, will need a stronger dogmatism in order to cover stubborn facts with the articles of faith. For example, the Marxist prophecy of the natural inevitability of the end of capitalism should become a radical dogma in order to cover the obvious tendency of capitalism to survive. Simple faith does not suffice for the Marxist religion: it needs a *certitude* of a dogmatic kind, sustained by an epistemological fervor that is rather irrational. Thus a Marxist does not simply *believe* in the dogma of the end of capitalism: he *knows* that this is bound to happen.

Therefore, one of the main problems of the Marxist secular religion seems to be its implicit requirement for radicalism. This brings about further difficulties for the process of post-Marxist de-radicalization. Since the Marxist belief in the dogma of the progress that must drive capitalist societies to a socialist order is not based only on hope, but on perfect certitude, the latter could be skillfully preserved even after the failure of Marxism, due especially to the ability of the intellectual mind in devising evasive subterfuges. Besides the creativity of neo-Marxist intellectuals over the last decades, especially in Western intellectual and academic life, one could still wonder whether they still preserve the tendency to radicalism. Similarly, many Eastern intellectuals who have abandoned their former Marxist creed have become radical liberals, or even libertarians. Did the neo-Marxist or post-Marxist intellectuals manage to create a de-radicalized post-Marxist *forma mentis*?

The basic radicalism of Marxism may also provide the epistemological advantage of a world that is supposed to be entirely knowable. If faithful Christians believe in the existence of revealed mysteries, whose essence is unknown, faithful Marxists, on the contrary, believe that no mystery is possible at all, on the grounds that the world and its lawfulness are entirely knowable. But if there were no mystery, then all

that gives a content to the religion is the system of dogmas. This system should be quite strong, in order to supply for the lack of all mysteries. This epistemological dogmatism belongs not only to the religion of Marxism, but, perhaps even more, to its ideology. Marxism seems to have succeeded as a secular religion not only because of its prophetic-millennial scenario, but also because it promised to simplify the world, so as to make all things entirely knowable.

Without this prophetic and epistemological lure, it would have been indeed difficult to explain the long survival of Marxism in many forms, more or less orthodox. The German sociologist Max Weber, who famously predicted a short-term collapse of Soviet rule, arguing that it could not produce an egalitarian or a satisfactory system, but rather one more oppressive than capitalism on the grounds of its tendency to become even more bureaucratic, was in many ways correct in his estimations about the future of Soviet communism. Yet, he understated (and perhaps could not realize, since he died in 1920) the degree of fanaticism that was likely to sustain the Soviet system. The fanaticism that was intrinsic to the Marxist faith seems to be, indeed, the most serious hindrance to a process of de-radicalization.

A second important problem of the Marxist secular religion, which also explains its radicalism, is the principle of negation or, in historical terms, the fact that it announces a historical break. As I have already argued, it is not easy to stop thinking in opposite and conflicting terms, once the mental habit of doing so has become almost second nature. But the dangerous risk of this negative mentality is that it is doomed to deal only with logical concepts, rather than with reality. Radicalism of a Marxist kind is therefore restricted to the knowledge of ideological principles that agree or disagree with the orthodox dogma.

How is De-Radicalization Possible?

Nothing is more dangerous than an idea when you have only one idea.

Alain (Émile Chartier)

In an interview that Hannah Arendt gave in 1970 to the German writer Adelbert Reif, published under the title “Thoughts on Politics and Revolution,” she commented on Thomas Mann’s utterance that “anti-

Bolshevism is the basic foolishness of our times.” She declared that, as a theory ending in “-ism,” anti-Bolshevism was an invention of the former communists. It was an invention not of the communists who were engaged in politics or were professional revolutionaries, but of the ones who *believed* in the system and who lost their faith after their personal disappointment with Stalin. Arendt adds that, after losing their faith, many former communist believers were on a quest for an opposite “God,” i.e. for another demon. They only overthrew their former model, and established a new one, a new “ism” that was opposite to their former convictions.

But it is not true, as Arendt further remarks, that these people’s mentality has changed. It would be mistaken to conclude that, instead of sharing mere convictions, they have seen reality and have considered it before deciding how to change it. Their way of thinking is exactly the same as the Bolsheviks’: all of them consider only their own strong ideological persuasion, so that the anti-Bolsheviks merely replace white with black. The anti-Bolsheviks warn against the devil in the East, just as the Bolsheviks warn against the devil in the West. The reality, Arendt reminds, is far more complex than this black-and-white ideological picture. And the problem with the person who fails to perceive this complexity is that all she can do is “to cut the world into pieces,” thus arriving only at absolute confusion.³⁰

The logic of this overthrow of the former model follows the same dialectical method that belongs to the Hegelian-Marxist system. Furthermore, a Manichaeian political view based on ideological convictions and on ideals, which only have to do with opposite, conflicting concepts, seems to underlie radicalism. Thus, if an intellectual “cure” for radicalism is to be imagined, it would probably consist primarily, as I have previously suggested, in a more realistic grasp of the complexity of the world, which may disrupt the “dialectical process” limited to the logic of two conflicting concepts.

In order to find out more precisely what the roots of radicalism are, it might be worth returning to a statement made by Sartre in his

³⁰ “Thoughts on Politics and Revolution” was published at the end of Hannah Arendt’s book, *Crises of the Republic*. I refer to the Romanian translation, *Crizele republicii*, trans. Ion Dur and D.I. Cenușer (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1999), 228.

Critique de la raison dialectique (1960; *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, 1976): any alleged surpassing of Marxism would lead in the best case to the rediscovery of yet another Marxist idea, and in the worst case to a return to pre-Marxism,³¹ since Marxism is the inescapable horizon of our times. In a note to her essay "On Violence" from *Crises of the Republic*, Arendt comments on the surprising fact that both Sartre and Aron, whose political conceptions are so radically different, fully agree on this point. And—she concludes—this agreement illustrates that the Hegelian view of history has imposed itself on both Marxist and anti-Marxist thought.³² And if we elaborate this conclusion in terms of the Hegelian dialectical method, it seems that the principle of negation provides the very foundation of political radicalism and of a Manichae-an ideological mentality.

If this is correct, we return to the paradox that the Marxist mentality was largely shaped according to the idealistic conception of history as displaying "the contradictions of Being," and thus as expressing irreducible conflicts and struggles. This conception already implies a rebel attitude towards the world, a negation that urges one to overthrow what he/she sees as imperfect and incomplete.

Idealism, Radicalism, and the Dialectic of History

A Hegelian idealist is usually blinded by his/her own dialectical construction; therefore, nothing could be considered superior or truer than the latter. The dogmatic blindness that almost inevitably results from this attitude may be still visible in our time. Since Marxism is supposed to be "the inescapable horizon of our time," i.e. the embodiment of the dialectic of history, the dogma that is accepted more or less tacitly by both Marxists and liberals was that sooner or later some ingredients, at least, of the Marxist vision will triumph in history. It is not surprising, therefore, that the current anti-globalist movement, part of which rejoiced in the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, shares the same dialectic of history. The attack on the World Trade Center was bound

³¹ See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique de la raison dialectique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), 17.

³² Hannah Arendt, *Crises of the Republic*, 196.

to happen, some claimed, since social inequality in the world grew too large due to what they said was the arrogant imperialism of the West. Idealized history may thus lead even to inhumane indifference towards the innocent victims of the largest terrorist attack of our times. Only the dialectic of history and the final liberation of mankind from poverty and inequality really matter, while the lives of those who should be sacrificed for this goal do not.

Furthermore, since there could be no history and progress without negation and division, any sound assessment of current or past events must necessarily rely on the annulment of a previous order. In Marx's writings this discontinuity is not expressed so uncompromisingly. He sees the socialist and the final communist society as the most developed kind of political community and the apex of human history. This implies, however, a continuity with the past. The radical mentality of the Marxist ideology seems to have simplified the dialectical vision up to a clear-cut dynamic contradiction: the negation of the status quo would assuredly result in a progress which *ipso facto* transforms the historical situation. And, as we have seen already, it is precisely this way of conceiving history by a dialectic of contradictions that seems to account for the radicalism of an ideological *forma mentis*: anything better can succeed if it is not brought about by a total rupture. And, of course, the collective agent who could play the messianic part in this revolutionary process is also needed. That radical group or class would have to believe in an *a priori* dialectical movement of history towards progress that involves contradictions and radical denials of the past. This belief can be seen, again, as *faith*, although not necessarily in the sense of a Marxist secular eschatology: it may be simply a secular faith in progress.

Hence, a disengagement with this simplified view of history based on a logical and conceptual dialectic seems to be the best remedy against radicalism—for it targets what may be called the root of the problem, or the main tenet of a radical Marxist or anti-Marxist mentality. If the *a priori* structure of progress, based on “a dichotomy of being,” and the conflicting contradictions were gradually removed from the intellectual imagination, a post-ideological and post-Marxist mentality is likely to emerge. Though, in Arendt's terms, this process would also mean to stop cutting “the world into pieces” by ideological classifications and to start perceiving the real complexity of things.

Conclusions

To sum up, a reflective challenge of ideology through a post-Marxist mentality is visible only among some former Marxist intellectuals, such as Leszek Kołakowski. The process of de-radicalization and the creation of a post-Marxist mentality seem to be quite difficult and complex, even after the failure of Marxism in Eastern Europe. As the reaction to the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001, has shown, there is still a large tendency to endorse Manichaeian ideological reductionism in interpreting real events, whose complexity requires sensitivity to what they actually convey, rather than the expectation that they will confirm simplified ideological concepts.

With this essay I tried to locate some of the intellectual origins of a Marxist (or anti-Marxist) radical mentality and to explore the content of a possible post-Marxist and post-ideological *forma mentis*. Then I tried to analyze the difficulties of a process of de-radicalization. In doing so, I returned not only to the structure of prophecy that underlies the Marxist vision of progress, but also to the principle of negation that was taken by Marx from Hegel's dialectic and inherited, afterwards, by a wide range of intellectuals, from anti-liberal Marxists to liberal anti-Marxists. If the disengagement with the explicit prophetic scenario of the Marxist eschatology was made easier by the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, a more subtle disengagement with the dialectic of history based on negation, Manichaeian division, and conflict still seems problematic.

Yet, as we are still trying to understand the intellectual lessons of the failure of Marxism in order to avoid legitimizing other repressive institutions, a disengagement with this conflicting mentality might help intellectuals to liberate themselves from idealistic and ideological temptations—without, however, falling, after "the death of utopia," in the opposite trap of skepticism. Moreover, by moderating subjective ideals through a perception of reality and critical reflection on theoretical principles, one may find it worthwhile to engage in an inquisitive quest for truth that is indeed post-ideological.

NICK MILLER

Yugoslavia's 1968

The Great Surrender

For Yugoslavia, 1968 did not follow the European script, and its drama lacked clear political and intellectual contours. Between Belgrade's student movement, tumult in the Serbian League of Communists, the growing national movement in Croatia, and rebellion in Kosovo, the year was one of entirely mixed messages, as the dynamism of Yugoslavia's partisan experiment began to give way to a new dynamic of ethnic affirmation. Of all these events, only the Belgrade student movement fits comfortably into any generalizable pattern regarding the year itself. The others were just signs of crisis in a state that had yet to determine how to govern itself. Yugoslavia's 1968 came as one version of a socialist Yugoslavia was expiring and another emerging. Processes overlapped; as the potentially self-managing, reform-Marxist Yugoslavia became just another example of "real existing socialism," new ethnic forces emerged. While there were certainly people in the streets of Yugoslavia, many of them were euphoric nationalists rather than seekers of the elusive socialism with a human face. Kosovo's Albanians, Croats to the north, and even Serbs who were energized by the Albanian and Croatian events all had begun to feel a new sort of empowerment that did not fit the fading commitment to the development of a new Yugoslavia, freed at last of competitive nationalism.

Three Points of Departure

Yugoslavia's 1968 was an accumulation of events whose logic only emerges with distance, so I will begin by providing three snapshots. The first comes from June. The Belgrade University student move-

ment, which lasted from June 2 to 9, 1968, was tame compared to similar movements elsewhere. The student movement—which spread to other universities in Yugoslavia—was triggered by a relatively trivial incident, but fueled by real resentments.¹ Slogans from the demonstrations spoke of the “red bourgeoisie,” “enrichment at the expense of workers,” and the failures of self-management.² Students occupied buildings of Belgrade University for several days, formed non-party “action committees,” and attracted the attention and support of leading members of the critical intelligentsia, both communist and non-communist. Before the movement gained much traction beyond the students, though, Tito himself appealed to them in a famous, and famously disingenuous, speech on June 9, in which he conceded that the students had legitimate complaints about the educational system, but that they had been “poisoned” by “Djilasites, Rankovićites, and Maotsetungites” who manipulated them.³ Student leaders interpreted Tito to mean that the state would address their real grievances.

The second snapshot comes from the Fourteenth Plenum of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Serbia. The Fourteenth Plenum did not have nearly the impact at the time that it would come to have in Serbian and Yugoslav historical memory. The outlines of the event are clear: Dobrica Ćosić and Jovan Marjanović were two members of the Central Committee that met at the end of May 1968, just a week or so before the beginning of the student movement. They each criticized the direction of the policies of the Leagues of Communists of Serbia and of Yugoslavia towards the autonomous provinces of Serbia (Kosovo and Vojvodina). Ćosić’s speech received more attention. Decrying the growth of “bureaucratic nationalisms,” Ćosić noted that “nationalist etatism... can bring into serious doubt

¹ For instance, the university, which had grown enormously in the preceding two decades, offered stipends to only 14 percent of them in 1965 (down from 25 percent five years earlier); the percentage of working-class students declined from 15 to 12 percent between 1962 and 1967.

² The best study of 1968 in Yugoslavia is Nebojša Popov’s *Društveni sukobi izazov sociologiji: “Beogradski jun” 1968* (Belgrade: Službeni glasnik, 2008), which existed in samizdat form for many years. See also Mirko Arsić and Dragan R. Marković, ’68: *Studentski bunt i društvo*, 2nd ed. (Belgrade: Istraživačko-izdavački centar SSO Srbije, 1985), which is flawed; the quotes come from page 86.

³ Arsić and Marković, ’68: *Studentski bunt i društvo*, 120.

our ambition to create a... society of socialistic self-management..."⁴ While Ćosić has been accused of spewing nationalist hate speech at the Fourteenth Plenum, the lesson we should take from this speech is not that he was a closet nationalist or that he somehow opened the floodgates of Serbian nationalism. Instead, we should duly note that his speech was a criticism of the failures of self-management, as of May 1968, as he saw them. Those failures were apparent to him in the growth of republican and provincial bureaucracies, which he believed self-management promised to shrink, not enhance. Ćosić sought the "creation of a society in which national equality is created via social relations, but without the state framework, state attributes, national ideology, and national or bureaucratic 'defenders' or 'representatives.'"⁵

Finally, a third snapshot: on November 29, 1968 (the Yugoslav "Revolution Day" holiday), violent demonstrations by Albanian students in Kosovo broke out in Priština and several other Kosovo towns. They were brought under control by force. Estimates of participation range from the hundreds to the thousands. All agree that there was scattered Albanian/Serbian violence through the following year. Early official versions blamed "social unrest" similar to that which brought Belgrade University students into the streets in June for the demonstrations. The party later blamed Albanian chauvinism, supported by propaganda from Albania itself and encouraged by Serbian and Montenegrin nationalism, for spurring the protests. One could also include as a complement to the Albanian national movement a growing Croatian movement, which would not truly find its voice for a few more years—but was building momentum in 1968.

The Great Surrender

These events do cohere, even if they do not seem in any obvious way similar. I would argue that they all were products of a great surrender on the part of Yugoslav communists, a surrender that saw the party

⁴ Dobrica Ćosić, "Kritika vladajuće ideološke koncepcije u nacionalnoj politici," in Dobrica Ćosić, *Stvarno i moguće: Članci i ogledi* (Ljubljana and Zagreb: Cankarjeva založba, 1988), 27–28.

⁵ Ćosić, "Kritika," 37.

shrink before the reality of economic crisis and concede all creative ground to the need to address that crisis, which it did, administratively. The catalyst, then, to these apparently disparate events, which put Marxist students, Albanian separatists, and communist bureaucrats in motion nearly simultaneously, was administrative reform. Administrative history does not generally scintillate—but in Yugoslavia's case, administrative change put that which made Yugoslav socialism unique, including self-management and a solution to national enmities in the state, in grave danger. Economic decline prompted so-called "liberal" reforms to the economy and constitution of Yugoslavia in the mid-1960s. These reforms foresaw the devolution of economic and political decision-making to the republican and provincial levels—where these powers would be held by republican and provincial Leagues of Communists. Authority was not so much decentralized as it was republicanized. Serbia's political leadership opposed this transition. Aleksandar Ranković was purged in 1966 due to his opposition to this new administrative model. One suspects that most Serbian opposition to the changes was practical and rooted in a fear of losing power in Yugoslavia. Others shared Ćosić's view that the reforms betrayed the true intent of self-management. Many simply saw the changes as legitimately threatening to their communities throughout Yugoslavia.

To the extent that Yugoslavia was still viewed as a vital experiment in Marxist thought and practice, these reforms—which put practicality ahead of creativity, management before inspiration—affected the experiment, to say the least. What did this reorganization of authority and administration in Yugoslavia mean for self-management, the original revision to the Stalinist utopia? Since self-management remained an elusive promise, it depended on one's perspective. For those who benefited from the new situation (Albanians and Croats, for instance), the republicanist model followed the logic of self-management, in that it moved power and decision-making closer to the people. For those who did not benefit from the new situation (Serbs, for instance), the new model betrayed the principles of self-management. For them, the constitutional reforms in Yugoslavia turned self-management into empty rhetoric. Serbs, obvious losers in the process of change, looked at events in Yugoslavia and saw their political power threatened and, in extreme cases, their communities endangered. The self-management many of them imagined, and one suspects longed for, was one in which

republican and provincial borders disappeared, in which enterprise-level decision-making became the norm, thereby rendering Yugoslavia a nation of people whose identities were entirely local, entirely rooted in what they did. The reforms of the 1960s proceeded as if those dreams had never existed. So this surrender to practicality was as disappointing to many Yugoslavs as it was empowering for others.

The economic crisis and ensuing administrative reforms in Yugoslavia prompted a variety of responses, some of them positive and potentially euphoric, others ranging from melancholy to angry. All of them were manifested during 1968. The students and professors of Belgrade University were angry; they had discovered that they were no longer participating in a grand act of creation, the building of anything inherently new; instead, they were there to be managed by a state that had rapidly lost its dynamism. Dobrica Ćosić and other quieter dissenters within the Serbian League of Communists were melancholic; they realized that they were witnessing the death throes of their ideal version of a self-managing Yugoslavia, sacrificed to economic and administrative realities. The Serbian League of Communists itself sought to adapt to the new realities as it cycled through leaders over the course of 1968. Ultimately, the LCS would hit upon the same post-'68 solutions found elsewhere in Eastern Europe: the faceless bureaucrat capable only of protecting his/her own position in the bureaucracy of lies. On the positive side of the ledger were Albanian and Croatian nationalists, for whom "republicanization" in administration seemed like a concession to their national interests. Over time, though, they would discover that the new reality in Yugoslavia was only superficially theirs. In the future, they would all find that republican and provincial authority was just as authoritarian as earlier centralized authority. The only real difference was that now there were eight, or ten, centers of stultifying sameness instead of just one.

Opposition in Yugoslavia in the Aftermath of 1968

Yugoslavia's 1968 generated both disappointment and euphoria. Each of the three disparate strands of opposition discussed so far—students, Ćosić, nationalists—eventually developed into its own movement that shared much, at least in form, with movements elsewhere in Eastern

Europe that emerged from the failure of the Prague Spring and other events. It is possible to say, in other words, that Yugoslav opponents of Titoism thereafter chose to “live in truth.” And comparing “Titoism” in its latter phase with other examples of “real existing socialism” is easy enough. But the “truths” that Yugoslav opponents of the regime told were of an entirely different quality than those told by, say, Charter 77.

Of the three strands, one of them directly mirrored that followed by the inspiring north—that which followed from the student movement. Following Tito’s manipulative speech of June 9, the government shut down the student magazine *Student* and drove the student leaders and their professors from the university. The regime revealed through its actions just how disingenuous its response to the student movement had been. The “Belgrade Eight” (all members of the *Praxis* group and professors at Belgrade University) were forced from their jobs by 1975 and hounded for the next decade and beyond.⁶ Younger professors and students who followed their lead were also expelled from the university or forced to quit their jobs there. For many of them, what had been a vital Marxist opposition gradually turned into a more general search for standard classical liberal goals: the right to speak, the right to gather, the right to openly critique their political, social, economic, and cultural system (one thinks here of Kosta Čavoški and his focus on the deadening Article 133 of the 1974 Yugoslav constitution, which forbade any speech that was construed by the regime to be “hostile enemy propaganda”). For them, the system that emerged in Yugoslavia after 1968, and more specifically after the proclamation of the 1974 constitution, was just as base as any other in Eastern Europe following the death of the Prague Spring. By the late 1970s, we are told, this group of oppositionists had founded a thriving underground university.⁷ In 1984, six Belgrade students were arrested while attending an underground university lecture by Milovan Djilas. This “Belgrade Six” became the cause celebre of the entire Belgrade intellectual community (but not necessarily Yugoslav—others had by now decided to go their own way, under conditions to be described below).

⁶ See Gerson Sher, *Praxis: Marxist Criticism and Dissent in Socialist Yugoslavia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), 239; and Nebojša Popov, *Contra Fatum* (Belgrade: Mladost, 1989).

⁷ No scholarly work, to my knowledge, has been done on this subject.

A second variety of opposition in Yugoslavia was strictly Serbian. It was initiated by Dobrica Ćosić with his May 1968 Fourteenth Plenum speech, and it remained his possession until Tito died and even a bit longer. Ćosić, in other words, was a lonely voice for his position, which was that Serbs suffered disproportionately, and purposely, in Tito's Yugoslavia, which had used them to support its centralism until the 1960s, and then discarded and eventually even cannibalized them after the promulgation of the 1974 constitution. Ćosić's approach to dissent was idiosyncratic and narcissistic: he generalized from his own experience as a one-time true-believer Titoist who moved into opposition once it became clear (to him) that Titoism meant Serbophobia. Whether reflected in Ćosić's work to revive the Serbian cultural organization called the Serbian Literary Guild ("the true extent of the spiritual unity of the Serbian people... is being called into question"⁸), or in his literature from the 1970s and 1980s ("in Europe there is not a nation which in the past two centuries has sacrificed so much for liberation and progress as the Serbian nation"⁹), or in his more consciously movement-building work after Tito died via the Committee for the Defense of the Freedom of Thought and Expression (which would "unite the struggle for the integrity of Serbian culture in Tito's Yugoslavia"¹⁰), Ćosić was a single voice for a Serbian renaissance until about 1986, when other Serbs joined his one-man chorus (as will be explained below). He also, it should be noted, remained a convinced socialist who hoped until the end to invigorate the experiment that Tito had abandoned in the 1960s.

Finally, the third category of opposition was unambiguously nationalist. Unlike the aforementioned two, nationalists emerged from the 1960s affirmed—theirs was the ascendant trajectory. There were, for instance, euphoric nationalists like those who had led the Croatian Spring and others who kept a simmering Albanian nationalism alive through the 1970s and 1980s. The same "surrender" that so disappointed Ćosić, the students, and their professors had emboldened the Albanian and Croat nationalists in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

⁸ Dobrica Ćosić, "Porazi i ciljevi," in Ćosić, *Stvarno i moguće*, 87.

⁹ Dobrica Ćosić, "Književnost i istorija danas," in Ćosić, *Stvarno i moguće*, 31–32.

¹⁰ Dobrica Ćosić, *Piščevi zapisi (1981–1991)* (Belgrade: Filip Višnjić, 2002) 128.

These were men and women whose movements superficially resembled that of Ćosić, but where Ćosić's nationalism was suffused in melancholy, theirs was positive and affirmative; thus, unlike Ćosić, they were unencumbered by any residual faith in the Yugoslav socialist experiment.¹¹ As did Ćosić, they competed within their own national community for support with those members of the first type of opposition mentioned above, those who chose to oppose on the basis of values and ideals rather than collectivist notions of the nation. This group includes Croats like Vlado Gotovac, Franjo Tudjman, Marko Veselica, and Dražen Budiša, and Albanians such as Adem Demaci.

These were then the three modes of opposition that emerged in Yugoslavia after 1968. Each eventually rejected the politics of reform for the politics of rejection and, in the extreme, revolution. The first category followed a similar trajectory to the movements of the northern tier—people of this oppositional inclination began with the desire to reform Yugoslav socialism but gradually abandoned hope for that option, moving instead towards a quiet opposition that focused on building a new community held together by a more truthful fabric. These were the men and women who held Yugoslav communism accountable for its own claims. The second category noted—that exemplified by Dobrica Ćosić—was often confused with the first, mainly because through the mid-1970s, Ćosić continued to appear in *Praxis* and to be heard making common cause with the Belgrade Eight professors.¹² The third group stands alone for its unrepentant commitment to national affirmation.

Special note needs to be made of the fact that members of all of these groups continued to work together on occasion into the 1980s. The Praxis group, for instance, included intellectuals from Croatia, Serbia, and elsewhere. They all worked together, and Ćosić was of-

¹¹ Many of them spent significant time in prison.

¹² An excellent example of the conflation at work can be seen in the diaries of Draža Marković, a leader of the League of Communists of Serbia, who wrote that he was “convinced that there [were] immediate links between [Ćosić’s] presentation at the Plenum and this [student] action.” The proximity of the dates of their respective protests notwithstanding, the party had the wrong *Praxists* in mind when they assumed Ćosić was a principal inspiration to the students. Draža Marković, *Život i politika, 1967–78* (Belgrade: Rad, 1987), vol. 1, 74.

ten considered part of the same community. In hindsight this seems strange, but at the time, I believe that those who collaborated all saw themselves as part of the same project, which was (still) to help Yugoslavia fulfill its promise, which was an old promise by now. There was a relatively brief historical moment, between 1980 and 1985, when it appeared that many of these disparate forms of opposition could unite into something just as universalist, just as beautiful as Charter 77 or KOR. After Tito died in April 1980, a group of Serbs including Ćosić tried to create a journal of ideas that would be called *Javnost* (The Public). This would be a Yugoslav journal that would take up the cause of the old struggle of ideas, in the hope that with Tito's death, the free flow of ideas might lead to a more vital socialism in Yugoslavia. Over 400 people from across Yugoslavia, we are told, signed a letter of support for the journal. The government rejected the request, but it is worth noting that this was still a reformist enterprise. The government rejection, followed by the government's arrest and conviction of a Serbian poet for having written about Tito in particularly ugly ways, prompted the birth of an underground movement for free speech. Two committees emerged, the Committee for the Protection of Artistic Freedom in 1982 and the Committee for the Defense of the Freedom of Thought and Expression in 1984. They were both assiduous defenders of the right to free speech, and they considered themselves representatives of all of Yugoslavia. They defended that right in petitions—probably hundreds of them—that the Yugoslav public never saw. They defended Adem Demaci, they defended Alija Izetbegović; they defended Croats and Slovenes, they defended Serbs.

The potential of this free speech movement was killed by the unwillingness of the various intellectual communities to work together. The committees, which might have become much greater than their origins as defenders of speech, remained Serbian productions. When the second and more influential one was formed in November 1984, Slovene and Croat invitees turned down the invitation, noting that they would rather work in their own local communities. Still, though, it was possible that Serbian intellectuals and cultural leaders could tap the strength of this commitment to free speech to build something greater, even if only Serbian. Alas, the moment neatly coincided with a critical transition in the nature of the free speech movement. In May 1985, Kosovo emerged into the Serbian consciousness in flagran-

te, with an act of violence that enraged the Serbian intellectual elite, which now gravitated to the self-absorbed Ćosić vision of a Serbian, rather than Yugoslav or socialist, future.¹³ From that point, the principled free speech movement transitioned into a much less principled movement in defense of the Serbian nation. The potential for an anational approach to opposition in Yugoslavia went untapped.

Yugoslavia's Generation of 1968: How Do They Measure Up?

It would be useful to evaluate the various strands of Yugoslav opposition against the standards established elsewhere in Eastern Europe. Generally, what we end up with is a panorama of Yugoslav opposition that occasionally looks and feels like other inspiring forms, with a bit of slippage. Things are not quite what they seem, or what they could have been. Thus, a couple of test questions:

Were the oppositionists in question reformist or rejectionist? A key to the work of the most inspiring opponents of the “real existing” regimes in the northern tier (Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary) was their conclusion that the regimes were not reformable, and thus that the only option was to separate spiritually from an inauthentic existence in real existing socialism. By contrast, in Yugoslavia, if this happened, it happened in idiosyncratic ways. One reason for this is that many (Serbian and Slovene, especially) opponents of the regime continued to believe in socialism, continued to argue from socialist (and even original Titoist) precepts, and in fact embraced the concept behind one of the key catch phrases from the early and more vital days of Titoism, which was that intellectuals should be participants in a great “struggle of ideas” as Yugoslav socialism developed. Croats, on the other hand, never really looked back on Titoism nostalgically, instead rejecting the state rather categorically after the end of the Croatian Spring. Their rejection of the order in which they lived

¹³ The best example of this movement towards Ćosić's vision came in January 1986, when three members of the Praxis group (Zagorka Golubović, Mihailo Marković, and Ljubomir Tadić) signed a petition in support of Kosovo's Serbian population. The petition could have been a simple plea for humanity, but it was packed with inflammatory historical references.

might therefore have rendered them analogs to KOR (the Workers' Defense Committee), Havel, and the various standard-bearers of the parallel society. Ultimately, though, we do not think of any of the men and women associated with the '68 generation among Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, or Albanians as part of the same phenomenon as Charter 77 and KOR. The reason for this is probably that while the form of their action might have been similar, the content of their ideas was quite different.

Who is "living in truth," and what were the truths they lived? Havel, Michnik, Konrád; living in truth, antipolitics, the parallel polis, KOR, Charter 77—these are all linked not just because they represented a rejection of the notion that communism in its actually existing form could be reformed, but because the content of their ideas and the actions that emerged from those ideas were beautiful. Much of the beauty in their ideas and their actions derived from the fact that they all reflected the belief that one could live an authentic life while surrounded by artifice and coercion. So far, so good: we can actually identify this sort of thing happening in Yugoslavia. Belgrade had a flying university, we are told, in the late 1970s through the mid-1980s. Dobrica Ćosić talked about the need for a little truth incessantly, before and after his break with the party. Many Croats and Albanians went to prison for their ideas, just as Havel, Michnik, and others did for theirs. Following Tito's death in 1980, a good portion of Serbia's intellectual elite participated in a protest movement that involved constant petitions, underground oversight committees, and occasional persecution as a result. In Kosovo, the 1990s were marked by the most elaborate example of a parallel polis in Yugoslavia. We can, in other words, check a few requisite "living in truth" boxes. Why be skeptical? Because the ideas that populated these examples of truth and authenticity were not beautiful.

Instead, those ideas were the ideas of ethnic exclusivism, rather than universalist humanism. When Croatian opponents of the regime went to prison, they went as nationalist separatists; they did not go to prison as creators, but as destroyers. They may have had cause, their cause might have been just—but it was not inspirational, it was not beautiful, it was antagonistic and narrow. When Dobrica Ćosić, in his lonely phase between 1968 and 1988, spoke of the need for truth—in 1996 he reminisced that he had "served my people... as a writer... by

speaking some truth about its existence”¹⁴—the truths he spoke were usually narcissistic truths about his Serbian nation. The Kosovo example was inspirational, but it happened in a time of war (after 1991) and under great duress—this was not an example of living in truth so much as an example of keeping one’s head down to avoid having it shot off.

The Legacy of 1968 in Yugoslavia

It must be obvious at this point that Yugoslavia’s 1968 differed from the templates established in Paris, Warsaw, Prague, and other cities. Instead of an “event” in its own right, Yugoslavia’s 1968 must be viewed today as a series of harbingers, promises that could be kept or broken, or perhaps warning signs to be ignored at one’s peril. There was the warning against betraying the promises of self-management; there was the warning against sacrificing Serbian interests in the name of administrative balance; there was the warning that some of Yugoslavia’s peoples were not there to be bought off via self-management at the expense of some semblance of independence. An altogether chaotic series of warnings, in other words, which left it to the next twenty years to sort out. When the sorting was done, national identity won out over other forms of identity. Serbian, Croatian, and Albanian warnings turned out to be much more powerful than the warnings issued by the students and professors of 1968. There is still handwringing over the fate of the generation of 1968. Many of its members bemoan the fact that the Marxist alternative failed in the face of demon nationalism. But, many of the people who look back nostalgically are also the people who gravitated to the nationalist camp over the years following 1968. Yugoslavia’s problems, in the eyes of its leading intellectual lights, were national.

Ultimately, as in other East European communist countries, the lesson of 1968 in Yugoslavia was probably that the most powerful intellectual and cultural forces in society determined that they had to “abandon the rusty Leninist paradigm” and to “transfer power from the party elite to society.”¹⁵ What makes Yugoslavia unique is what

¹⁴ *Nezavisna svetlost*, October 6–12, 1996.

¹⁵ Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Reinventing Politics: Eastern Europe from Stalin to Havel* (New York: Free Press, 1992), 144.

happened when power finally made that transition to society. The fact that processes that could begin in such similar conditions and follow such analogous paths, paths marked by the same words and shared goals (the search for honest, authentic communication—the Truth—primary among them), and wind up at such radically different conclusions, demands explanation. I would argue that the solution to this dilemma can be found in the types of issues that the regimes in question lied about. In Yugoslavia, when the regime made promises, one of the primary promises was that it would bring an end to ethnic conflict among the people of the state. When it failed to measure up to its own promises, it told its populations lies—just as the Husaks and Giereks of the world had done, but with different content. When Poles became outraged, they became outraged at assaults on their human dignity. When Yugoslavs became outraged, they became outraged at betrayals of their national dignity.

CRISTIAN VASILE

1968 Romania

Intellectuals and the Failure of Reform

My paper examines the relationship between Romanian intellectuals and Ceaușescu's regime, with a particular emphasis on the late 1960s. It explores some of the reasons for the absence of a solid reform movement oriented towards a dissident Marxism, and capable of defying the neo-Stalinist tendencies of the Romanian Communist Party (RCP) power-holders. With this purpose in mind, I will also analyze the 1968 political and ideological actions of some important figures of the Romanian intelligentsia.

Unlike Czech and Slovak philosophers, their Romanian peers did not draw up and did not pursue the path of an anti-Stalinist critique with elements of alternative political conceptualization. The belated appearance of an anti-Soviet strand in the nation-building process under communism, the radical anti-intellectual repression wave at the end of the 1950s and beginning of 1960s, and the internal disputes within creative unions, universities, and the academy, all these were crucial factors that favored Ceaușescu's concentration of power, the growing personality cult, and the instrumentalization of national feelings.

With few exceptions tainted by opportunism and timidity, Romanian philosophers neglected the cooperation and dialogue with the writers' guild. By and large, the latter hoped, especially between 1965 and 1971, to get the best out of their strange bed-fellowship with Nicolae Ceaușescu. Subsequently, many of them joined the RCP and supported the communist leadership in the context of the 1968 Soviet military invasion in Czechoslovakia. When the intellectuals' confidence in Ceaușescu was shattered mainly by his neo-Stalinist drive from 1971, it was already too late for any reform or revisionist attempts.

In the autumn of 2006, professor Vladimir Tismaneanu reopened the file concerning the 1965 unmasking (*demascare*) of some rebellious Philosophy Department students.¹ The July 1965 Ninth Congress of the Romanian Communist Party was celebrated as usual by Nicolae Ceaușescu and his ideological servants, as an anti-dogmatic moment which indicated a sort of Communist renewal, ideological relaxation, and liberalization. But a few months later a violent episode in the history of the Bucharest University's Philosophy Department thwarted this myth of Ceaușescu's post-1965 propaganda.

It is true that there were some discouraging signs in the spring of 1965. Even during the period of cultural relaxation, any form of student initiative which avoided youth party organization was repudiated by the Agitprop Department.² Such things happened in the case of a memorandum signed by 300 students demanding more opportunities for intellectual and artistic advance and promotion in the field of scientific and literary creation. Moreover, in the fall of 1965 a group of five students became the victim of a shameful frame-up staged by the *Securitate* in cooperation with the party apparatus, and the Communist Youth organization.³ This sort of show trial was organized at the main lecture hall (aula) of the university, and some of their contemporaries compared it with the 1950s exposure of "class enemies" set up by chief ideologist Leonte Răutu and his team in the Agitprop Department. Those students who were the leaders of their generation used to intensely discuss theoretical issues, and frequently asked inconvenient questions during teaching seminars. Moreover, they expressed reticence towards Ceaușescu's policy and pleaded for the abandoning of Stalinist theories and practices. The ideological prosecutors both from the Agitprop Department and the Ministry of the Interior (*Se-*

¹ Vladimir Tismaneanu, "Un puzzle cu Securitate, partid și UTC" [A Puzzle with Securitate, Party, and Youth Communist Union], in *Refuzul de a uita. Articole și comentarii politice (2006–2007)* [Refusal to Forget: Political Articles and Commentaries (2006–2007)] (Bucharest: Curtea Veche Publishing, 2007), 154.

² "Information concerning Certain Aspects of the Political Educational Work among Students in 1965," Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale (Central Historical National Archives, Bucharest), Fund Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party—Propaganda and Agitation Section (hereafter: ANIC, FCCRCP—PAS), File no. 20/1965, 10.

³ Vladimir Tismaneanu, "Un puzzle cu Securitate, partid și UTC," 154–156.

curitate) accused them of “launching revisionist theories, which have nothing in common with Marxist-Leninist doctrine,”⁴ such as the passage from socialism into communism in a violent way, through a resort to the masses. The alleged leader of the group, Ștefan Nicolici, had been charged with the attempt to illegally rally his university colleagues at the Grozavești-Regie Dormitory, an important students’ residence complex located near the center of Bucharest. According to the official version, the aim of this reunion was to urge the people to go out and demand a real turn to communism by replacing “state” property with “all people’s” property.⁵ Ștefan Nicolici got support for this act and went too far. He blamed the RCP leadership for diminishing revolutionary vigilance and for adopting a bourgeois way of life (“*embourgeoisement*”). Consequently, Nicolici and his colleagues (Stelian Traian Vassar, Mihai Turcu, Octavian Nicolae, Iulian Bădin)—according to the ideological indictment—regarded the students as the only true revolutionary force that had the task to take action in order to ensure the transition to communism.⁶

The professors did not take action to dismiss the accused or to exonerate them from blame. In fact, some of the philosophy professors (Tudor Bugnariu among them) were put on the blacklist too by the Agitprop Department and political police. Those professors, some of them former Stalinist ideologues, presented a sort of critical perspective on official Marxism-Leninism,⁷ and, after 1964, embraced humanistic Marxism. The 1965 power-holders solved this incipient ideological conflict both by intimidation and a divide-and-conquer policy,⁸ namely by encouraging their rivals, young professors eager to become social upstarts and who identified themselves with the Romanian nationalistic beliefs of the Ceaușescu regime. Accidentally or not, some of

⁴ ANIC, FCCRCP—PAS, File no. 20/1965, 85.

⁵ It may be assumed that the group’s members were influenced by Yugoslav notions of self-management as well as some Marxist political tenets about mass mobilization and permanent criticism of the party bureaucracy.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Virgil Burlă, “Iosif Boda—Marele Inchizitor. Odiseea ‘Zece pentru România’ continuă” [Iosif Boda—The Grand Inquisitor: Ten Winners for Romania’s Odyssey Continues], *România liberă*, January 17, 2006.

⁸ Vladimir Tismaneanu, “Un puzzle cu Securitate, Partid și UTC,” 158, 164, 179–181.

the “heretical” professors were of Jewish origin. It remains to be seen whether their decline was due to the widely perceived xenophobic tendencies of Nicolae Ceaușescu as leader of the RCP. After the party leadership decided to brutally intervene, Professor Tudor Bugnariu, a party old-timer and son-in-law of famous poet and philosopher Lucian Blaga, lost his position as dean at the Philosophy Department. Some other Marxist enthusiasts, such as professor of aesthetics Ion Ianoși, did not influence the ideological debate much within the party in so far as to create a breakthrough. Their initiatives were limited to bringing to light in the 1970s and the 1980s fragments lifted from Karl Marx’s writings,⁹ and a few valuable philosophical and sociological works. Michael Shafir pertinently described both the 1968 debate over whether philosophy is a science, and the few attempts to “liberate” philosophy from strict party supervision.¹⁰ He concluded that the lack of Marxist tradition was responsible for the inability of intellectuals to formulate demands for change in required Marxist terminology.

Mihai Șora, one of the most important contemporary Romanian philosophers—a philosopher of dialogue, as Aurelian Craiutu called him¹¹—and a former communist without being a Marxist, expressed a similar point of view. After 1989, Mihai Șora explained why in Romania former Marxists and pro-Stalinist intellectuals did not constitute the driving force for Marxist revisionism and democratic socialism which led to the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and to the 1968 Prague Spring. In his opinion, the Hungarians, the Czechs, and even the Poles had an important and lasting left-wing movement with a solid intellectual support and participation. The duration and the constancy from the interwar period created a political and intellectual tradition. That was also the reason why public perception in the 1950s and 1960s did

⁹ See *Karl Marx în 1234 fragmente alese și adnotate de Ion Ianoși* [1234 Passages from Karl Marx Selected and Annotated by Ion Ianoși], Editura Fundației Culturale Ideea Europeană, Bucharest, 2004.

¹⁰ Michael Shafir, “Political Stagnation and Marxist Critique: 1968 and Beyond in Comparative Perspective,” *British Journal of Political Science* 14, no. 4 (October 1984), 448–450. For the evolutions in the cultural-philosophical field in Romania and other countries of East Central Europe, see also Vladimir Tismaneanu, “Critical Marxism and Eastern Europe,” *Praxis International* 3, no. 3 (October 1983), 248–259.

¹¹ Aurelian Craiutu, “Mihai Șora, a Philosopher of Dialogue,” *East European Politics and Societies* 21, no. 4 (2007), 611–638.

not identify the entire Marxist political structure and movement with the foreign (Soviet) occupation.¹²

Besides this cultural-ideological dimension, one could also cite the lack of solidarity, and the limited ability to defy the Department of Propaganda and Culture. For example, as Vladimir V. Kusin wrote, a team led by philosopher Radovan Richta functioned in Czechoslovakia and commented on the scientific and technical revolution. It emphasized that the reality of the modern world cannot be controlled with power-political means, but only through science, and the idea that the Agitprop Department was not omnipotent.¹³ No such real interdisciplinary team existed in Romania. The fact that the evil spirit of Leonte Răutu, the most important ideologist of the RCP/Romanian Workers' Party (RWP), survived even after 1965 also meant the suppression or, at least, the discouragement of any theoretical debate that could steadily bring up seriously the issue of Ceaușescu's official Marxism. The tight ideological control over theoretical debates and literary circles dejected many intellectuals. Moreover, the fact that some of them (Ileana Mărculescu, Mihail Cernea) emigrated during the 1970s¹⁴ undoubtedly weakened the feeble group of those capable of theoretical innovation. Those who remained (Ion Ianoși, Radu Florian, Paul Cornea, Henri Wald) did not influence the cultural ideological battle for political change and did not contribute to reforming Ceaușescu's socialism. As Vladimir Tismaneanu correctly noted, some of the most prominent Marxist thinkers of the twentieth century (Lucien Goldmann and

¹² Interview with Mihai Șora; Mihai Șora, "Leonte Răutu era o legendă..." [Leonte Răutu Was a Legend], in *Perfectul acrobat. Leonte Răutu, măștile raului* [The Perfect Acrobat: Leonte Răutu, the Masks of Evil], (Bucharest: Editura Humanitas, 2008), 145–146.

¹³ Vladimir V. Kusin, *The Intellectual Origins of the Prague Spring* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 92. Radovan Richta's book, *Civilization at the Crossroads*, was translated and came out in Romania at Editura Politică (Political Publishing House) in the collection *Ideii Contemporane*, at the beginning of the 1970s. The book failed to generate significant discussions and was only rarely recommended as bibliography in Romanian universities.

¹⁴ Michael Shafir, "Political Stagnation and Marxist Critique: 1968 and Beyond in Comparative Perspective," 458.

Georges Haupt) started their intellectual careers in Romania.¹⁵ But in the 1960s neither was in Romania any longer.

The lack of dialogue within the Romanian intellectual milieu, especially between philosophers and writers, deeply influenced the cultural developments in the 1970s and the 1980s. At the end of the 1960s philosopher Constantin Noica had published numerous articles in *Gazeta Literară* (later titled *Romania Literară*), the main Romanian Writers' Union weekly magazine. But, as former sympathizer of the fascist inter-war extreme-right Legionary Movement, he could not (and did not want to) bring an ideological contribution to the theoretical discussion on Marxism.¹⁶ He did examine Karl Marx's role within the Romanian intellectual milieu only in a semi-biographical work of fiction entitled *Rugați-vă pentru fratele Alexandru*.¹⁷ On the other hand, one of postwar Romania's leading writers, Nicolae Breban, a German-speaking Romanian interested in philosophy, and former student at the Philosophy Department, placed his trust in Ceaușescu until 1971. Moreover, his favorite readings were Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche,¹⁸ not Karl Marx. Nicolae Breban joined the Central Committee of the RCP and became a favorite of the regime. He probably understood too late that Nicolae Ceaușescu had no intention of abandoning the idea of tight ideological control over literature.

One of the most important omens for the cultural liberalization appeared precisely in 1968, after Ceaușescu's condemnation of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. In his speech delivered on December 28, 1968, in front of creative unions' and cultural institutions'

¹⁵ Vladimir Tismaneanu, "From Arrogance to Irrelevance: Avatars of Marxism in Romania," in Raymond Taras, ed., *The Road to Disillusion: From Critical Marxism to Post-Communism in Eastern Europe* (Armonk, NY, and London: M.E. Sharpe, 1992), 136.

¹⁶ An explanation for the seeming tolerance shown by the authorities toward Noica's circle is given in Mihai Botez, "Declinul marxismului și criza comunismului" [The Decline of Marxism and the Crisis of Communism], *Agora* 2 (1990), no. 2.

¹⁷ Constantin Noica, *Rugați-vă pentru fratele Alexandru* (Bucharest: Editura Humanitas, 1990).

¹⁸ Aura Christi, ed., *Nicolae Breban 70* (Bucharest: Editura Fundației Culturale Ideea Europeană, 2004), 7. Nicolae Breban, *Fr. Nietzsche. Maxime comentate* [Fr. Nietzsche. Commentated Sayings] (Bucharest: Editura Fundației Culturale Ideea Europeană, 2004).

representatives, Nicolae Ceaușescu, to all appearances, sought to gain the good will of the writers and artists.¹⁹ But these seemingly conciliatory gestures were accompanied with innuendos and vague warnings. Ceaușescu let the intellectuals know that he did not intend to focus on the ideological errors, and on the lack of political orientation of their works, but he did take into consideration the subservience to the ruler, i.e., himself. Ceaușescu also mentioned, among other things, some “drawbacks and deficiencies” in Romanian art and culture. He used as an example the fact that theater directors were receptive to Western influences or foreign stage representations and that, consequently, they went so far as to compel the attention of the RCP leadership. The hardening of the tone towards the intellectual community culminated in July 1971, when Ceaușescu’s cultural ideological thesis announced an era of censorship and stagnation.

The aforementioned Paul Cornea, a well-known literary historian and former general director of the Theaters’ Department of the Ministry of Culture, probably better understood what could have happened during this new cultural ideological “frost.” He was an awakened Marxist intellectual of Jewish origin who joined the RCP in the fall of 1944, even before his graduation (he was trained as a sociologist). In 1949 Cornea accepted the proposal of Leonte Răutu (Romania’s Zhdanov) to become a university professor. But Cornea rejected Răutu’s suggestion to teach scientific socialism and Marxism-Leninism; instead he chose the Faculty of Romanian Language and Literature (the University of Bucharest’s Sociology Department was suppressed in 1948).²⁰ Simultaneously, Cornea was appointed within the ranks of the Romanian Communist Youth Organization (later *Uniunea Tineretului Muncitor*—Workers’ Youth Association) as a member of its Central Committee. After 1952, following Ana Pauker’s purge,²¹ he

¹⁹ “Note concerning the meeting between Party and State leaders, and creative unions’ and cultural institutions’ representatives (December 28, 1968);” ANIC, FCCRCP—PAS, File no. 6/1968, 2–7.

²⁰ Paul Cornea, “Nu caut vizibilitatea, dimpotriva, incerc sa-mi protejez timpul liber” [I Am Not Looking for Public Visibility—On the Contrary, I Am Trying to Defend My Moments of Leisure], *Observator cultural*, no. 458, January 22–28, 2009.

²¹ See for details Robert Levy, *Ana Pauker: The Rise and Fall of a Jewish Communist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

was discharged from the ideological party apparatus and transferred to the Ministry of Culture (Theaters and Musical Institutions' Department) and then to Publishing Houses Direction. Soon after 1952 he became a political outsider, and his open-minded thinking, moderate political orientation, and genuine Marxist beliefs clashed with the absurd instructions, directives, and party guidance concerning the intellectual life, the arts, and public theatrical representations.

In his confessions published after 1989,²² Cornea asserted that, in spite of all political harassments and ideological obstacles due to his *apparatchik* superiors, he preferred in the 1950s to naïvely ignore the distance between his communist ideals and the way RCP/RWP leadership put into practice the Marxist-Leninist ideology (with totalitarian drive). Looking back upon the past (especially the 1956 moment—mainly Khrushchev's secret speech), Cornea remembered that the Hungarian Revolution shattered his hopes. Nevertheless, he did not immediately say “the golden bowl is broken” but chose to take a duplicitous stand in his relationship with the Communist Party leadership. His communist faith was irremediably dashed in the early 1960s, when Cornea became a victim of the purges that hit the Ministry of Culture, accused—during a general assembly of all department employees—of individualism, liberal attitudes, and ideological deviation. The specter of “revisionism” and “anarchic liberalism” was brandished, and those party members who challenged the communist leadership through the agency of spontaneous activity and hesitations were expelled from the RWP.²³ It is quite symptomatic and rare for those times that nobody blamed Cornea besides the ideological prosecutors who presided the show-trial-style party meeting. But the subordinates' refusal to condemn their former leader, fallen into disgrace with the party, was not a conscientious ideological stand, but an expression of their personal devotion to Cornea.²⁴

²² Paul Cornea, “Nu caut vizibilitatea, dimpotrivă, încerc să-mi protejez timpul liber,” Parts 1–3, in *Observator cultural*, nos. 458–460, January 22–28 to February 5, 2009.

²³ Vladimir Tismaneanu, “From Arrogance to Irrelevance: Avatars of Marxism in Romania,” 144.

²⁴ Paul Cornea, “Nu caut vizibilitate, dimpotrivă, încerc să-mi protejez timpul liber.”

Afterwards Cornea decided to adopt a *modus vivendi* with the regime. Later, in the early 1960s, he served as chairman of the state department for cinematography, and in the midst of the 1960s, he remained as a professor at the Philology Department at the University of Bucharest, not fueling any serious ideological debate on critical Marxism which could hinder or disturb the newly-born Ceaușescu personality cult and “dynastic socialism.” At the same time, Cornea had been engaged in academic pursuits, in empirical sociological research, as program coordinator at the G. Călinescu Literary History Institute of the Romanian Academy, where he guided a research team whose main field of interest was the sociological inquiry of the number of books printed in Romania through modern times. Soon its research came to a dead end both for political reasons (the number of copies of printed works became top-secret information), and because of the petty interests of some publishing houses’ directors.²⁵

In 1968 Cornea believed he was in a protected “narrow shell” both at the University and the Literary History Institute. Therefore, in a few private conversations he used anti-Ceaușescu expressions similar to those which circulated verbally. But he was wrong; he continued to be watched by the political police, through the agency of informers, and at the end of the 1960s he was warned directly by the chief of Bucharest Party Committee to avoid talking even with his closest friends about “Ceaușescu’s failure of building socialism.” Otherwise, there would be consequences for both his family and his academic career. Increasingly frightened, Cornea isolated himself until 1989 and applied only a few of his Marxist ideas in his research, mainly in his monumental book about the origins of Romanian Romanticism, which is still the best work on this topic.²⁶ In fact, in 1968, Cornea’s quest for a humanistic Marxism ended. Along with it, his status as potential oppositional socialist thinker also vanished.

Another human source capable of producing differing and nuanced interpretations of Marxism was represented by the former Social

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Paul Cornea, *Originile romantismului românesc. Spiritul public, mișcarea ideilor și literatura între 1780–1840* [The Origins of Romanian Romanticism: The Public State of Mind, Spreading of Ideas, and the Literature 1780–1840] (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1972) (2nd edition: Editura Cartea Românească, Bucharest, 2008).

Democratic intellectuals who joined the RCP/RWP in February 21–23, 1948. Their socialist colleagues who refused to adhere to the so-called “working-class-movement unification,” such as Constantin Titel Petrescu (leader of the Social Democrat Party—PSD—until March 1946), Iosif Jumanca, and Ion Flueraș, ended up in prison, where some of them died.²⁷ Two other well-known Social Democrats (Lotar Rădăceanu and Ștefan Voitec) abandoned C. Titel Petrescu and rose to the top levels of the new party (the Romanian Workers’ Party), apparently as a reward for the part they played in the “merger” of the left-wing Romanian Social Democrats with the Communists in February 1948.²⁸ Their opportunistic adhesion to communist ranks was followed by two other important socialist intellectuals who held also significant government positions within the Ministry of Arts: writers Ion Pas and Ștefan Tita.

It should be noted that some of the actions and attitudes they adopted before February 1948 did anger the Communist leadership, which did not forget the inter-war Comintern label for the SD—“Social Fascist.” Significantly, even apparently zealous pro-communist Ștefan Voitec, minister of national education between October 1944 and January 1948, pushed things so far that Ana Pauker called him “reactionary” at an RCP gathering, reproaching him with the cadres’ policy within the Education Department, and the insufficient “democratization” (i.e. Sovietization) of the school system.²⁹ Due both to his seeming lack of revolutionary militance and to the alleged attempt to stop the communist pervasiveness within the Education Department’s

²⁷ See for details Nicolae Jurca, *Istoria Social-Democratiei din Romania* [The History of Romania’s Social Democracy], Editura Științifică, Bucharest, 1994; Sorin Radu, “Lichidarea social-democrației din Romania. Cazul Ion Flueraș (august 1944–iunie 1953),” [The Suppression of Romania’s Social Democracy: Case-Study—Ion Flueraș, August 1944–June 1953], in *Anales Universitatis Apulensis, Series Historica*, 10/I, 2006, 101–131; Ion Flueraș (1882–1953). *Social-Democrație și sindicalism* [Ion Flueraș 1882–1953: Social Democracy and Trade Unionism] (Bucharest: Editura Nemira, 2007).

²⁸ D. A. Tomasic, “The Rumanian Communist Leadership,” in *Slavic Review* 20, no. 3, October 1960, 489. For the political biography of Ștefan Voitec, see also Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Arheologia terorii* [The Archaeology of Terror], third ed., afterword by Cristian Vasile (Bucharest: Curtea Veche Publishing, 2008).

²⁹ Cristian Vasile, “Educație și ideologie în Romania, 1948–1953” [Education and Ideology in Romania 1948–1953], *Revista istorică* 15, no. 5–6, 2004.

and schools' trade unions, the RCP leadership tried to undermine Ștefan Voitec and to closely supervise his activity through communist dignitaries (under-secretaries of state at the Education Department) and Public Education Commission, an organ subordinated to the RCP Central Committee's Agitprop Department.³⁰ Eventually, at the beginning of 1948, Ștefan Voitec was removed from office.

From the communist point of view, at the end of December 1947 the very existence of Romanian social democracy—even in its pro-communist version led by Ștefan Voitec and Lotar Rădăceanu—endangered and hampered the ideological unity of the working class and hindered the RCP elite's control and strict supervision of the educational system and the arts. At the head of the Ministry of Arts were two inter-war socialist writers and journalists—the aforementioned Ion Pas (as minister) and Ștefan Tita (as secretary general, deputy minister). Although both of them adopted pro-communist stances, the RCP Agitprop Department suspected that in 1930 Ion Pas, under the pseudonym "P. Ioanid," had translated into Romanian the main work of the apostate French-Romanian communist writer Panait Istrati *Confession pour vaincus: Après 16 mois dans l'URSS*. On the other hand, Ștefan Tita was accused both of maintaining the institutional structures of the old bourgeois Ministry of Culture together with its "corrupt" personnel, networks, and practices, and of tolerating an inadequate theater repertoire—i.e. plays with "reformist" and subversive messages that could have political implications. It is worth adding that between 1944 and 1947, the Social Democratic Party gathered around 500,000 members, mostly workers and functionaries, and controlled some important trade unions and cultural institutions. Therefore, top RCP leaders feared that the Social Democratic thought could provide an attractive model for Romanians, too scared by the pro-Soviet internationalist discourse of the RCP. Consequently, the instructors of the Agitprop Department started to gather information and compromising "proof" indicating Ștefan Tita's tolerance of bribery and reckless policy of expenditures from the Arts Department's budget.³¹ Although Pas

³⁰ ANIC, FCCRCP—PAS, File No. 13/1947, 68; *ibid.*, File No. 42/1948, 1–2.

³¹ Cristian Vasile, "Impunerea controlului comunist asupra culturii, 1948–1953. Aspecte instituționale" [The Imposition of Communist Control over Romanian Culture 1948–1953: Institutional Aspects], *Arhivele Securității* 2 (2006), 44–53.

and Tita officially became communists in February, by May 1948 the two ministers had lost their offices.

The deaths in jail of Rădăceanu's and Voitec's former socialist anti-communist colleagues Iosif Jumanca (1949) and Ion Flueraș (1953) were haunting reproaches for the communists' fellow travelers. Moreover, the destiny of their former leader, Constantin Titel Petrescu, did not encourage them to try to gain more legitimacy within the RWP and to exploit the 1956 moment to take a reformist stand. Constantin Titel Petrescu was arrested in 1948 and was imprisoned for seven years. He agreed—probably under physical and psychological duress—to sign a letter to the communist press in which he praised the “amazing RWP accomplishments” in industry and agriculture and “confessed” that he was wrong when he boycotted the unity of the working class.³²

Until February 21–23, 1968, the twentieth anniversary of the “working class unity,” Voitec and his former Social Democrat fellows who entered the RWP failed to realize any transfer of Socialist ideas and values to the RCP/RWP. Instead they endorsed every action of the communist leadership under Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and Nicolae Ceaușescu.



In conclusion, unlike the Czechoslovak case, where the fusion of reformist thought inside and outside the political structure produced a feeling of national unity as an aggregative force inclined towards a new model of (democratic) socialism and where the post-January 1968 power-holders showed moral sincerity,³³ in Romania, Ceaușescu was, in fact, the embodiment of the conservative communist system, a latent neo-Stalinist, a sly Antonín Novotný, not an Alexander Dubček. Ceaușescu co-opted the formulation of a new model of democratic socialism. In all likelihood, the latter was an alien concept for the majority of the intelligentsia. The lack of trust, lack of self-confidence,

³² “Scrisoarea d-lui C. Titel Petrescu” [The Letter of Mr. C. Titel Petrescu], in *Puterea comunistă și exilul în oglindă (Texte polemice)* [The Communist Power and the Exile Reflected in the Mirror: Polemical Writings], ed. Nicolae Merișanu and Adrian Majuru (Bucharest: Institutul Național pentru Memoria Exilului Românesc—Monitorul Oficial, n.d.).

³³ Vladimir V. Kusin, *The Intellectual Origins of the Prague Spring*, 141–142.

the communication deficit within the Romanian intellectual milieu (especially between philosophers and writers), and the 1950s large-scale repression (unmasking, exposures, various forms of harassment), which continued even after 1965, could explain the failure of reform in Romania. After 1989 some analysts and eyewitnesses suggested that “resistance through culture” was a convenient excuse for moral resignation and cynicism.

The political culture of Romanian socialism was different from the Czechoslovak one. Romanian social democracy was weak and crashed after 1948. Unlike Romania, Czechoslovakia was an urban society and possessed a fair level of industrial sophistication. Some of the Romanian intellectuals were from rural origins and saw Ceaușescu as the leader of a national revival. This group tended to view Marxist ideology as an entity alien to the Romanian soul and as a doctrine promoted by members of the national minorities’ intellectual elite (Jewish, Hungarian, etc.). Therefore, they placed their trust in and even “gambled” on Ceaușescu’s nationalistic and anti-Soviet discourse. The skillful manipulation of the national ideology provided a strong and enduring focus of identification with the communist regime,³⁴ and with Nicolae Ceaușescu in particular, who had just condemned the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia.

³⁴ Dragoș Petrescu, “The Alluring Facet of *Ceaușescuism*: Nation-Building and Identity Politics in Communist Romania, 1965–1989,” in *New Europe College Yearbook*, 2003–2004, ed. Irina Vainovski Mihai (Bucharest: New Europe College, 2005), 262.

VLADIMIR TISMANEANU and BOGDAN IACOB

Betrayed Promises

Nicolae Ceaușescu, the Romanian Communist Party,
and the Crisis of 1968

There are moments in history that indelibly mark the memories of their contemporaries. The balcony scene on August 21, 1968, when Nicolae Ceaușescu, general secretary of the RCP, addressed a crowd of over 100,000 from the Central Committee building in one of Bucharest's main squares and vehemently condemned the invasion of Czechoslovakia a few hours after the Warsaw Pact intervention, a scene that became a national-communist legend, was eulogized by many as a gesture of heroic proportions: the Romanian David valiantly defying the Soviet Goliath. It was in fact nothing but a skillful masquerade, but it worked: a power-obsessed neo-Stalinist leader without the slightest democratic inclinations succeeded overnight in awakening popular enthusiasm and gaining enthusiastic credit from a population convinced that Romania would follow the line of liberalization and rapprochement with the West.¹ Ironically, it was precisely from the same fateful balcony that Ceaușescu delivered his last speech to the Romanians, on December 21, 1989, when he portrayed the revolutionaries in Timișoara and Bucharest as “counter-revolutionary hoodlums” on the payroll of foreign intelligence services and other sworn enemies of the cause of socialism. This time, however, the old trick did not work: Ceaușescu was angrily booed and had to leave the building by helicopter to an unknown destination together with his wife Elena.²

¹ See Vladimir Tismaneanu's chapter “Iluzia utopiei și promisiunile trădate: Semnificațiile anului 1968” in his *Naufragiul utopiei: Anul revoluționar 1989* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2009).

² Dennis Deletant recently presented, on the basis of declassified archival material, the transition undergone by Ceaușescu's attitude within the Warsaw Pact, from opposing intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968 to advocat-

They were both executed on Christmas Day under hyperbolic charges (genocide, huge foreign bank accounts, etc.). Twenty years earlier, nobody could have predicted this bloody dénouement. At that moment, Ceaușescu was regarded as a maverick communist, a true reformer, and a courageous peer of Marshal Tito's in the resistance to Soviet hegemonism. Bucharest was one of Eastern Europe's capitals courted both by Western officials (Charles de Gaulle visited Romania in April 1968, Richard Nixon in 1969) and leaders of increasingly autonomous Communist parties (Luigi Longo, Enrico Berlinguer, and Giancarlo Pajetta from Italy, Waldeck Rochet and Jean Kanapa from France, Mitsos Partsalidis, Panayotis Dimitriou, and Zisis Zografos from the Greek Communist Party–Interior, Franz Muhri and Franz Marek of Austria and most frequently Santiago Carrillo, Dolores Ibarruri, and Manuel Azcarate of Spain).³

For Ceaușescu and his associates, the Prague Spring's failure served to justify the dogma of the indefectible unity of party, leader, and nation. The party's leader was simultaneously the main author of doctrine, the visionary genius, and the "architect of the national destiny." The slogan "Partidul, Ceaușescu, Romania" was ubiquitous at the time and would be deployed extensively until the very end. Ceaușescu's August 21 speech therefore emphasized first and foremost the unity of the party leadership and the symbiotic relationship between party and people. But it also reassured the party Old Guard

ing military action against Solidarność in the summer of 1989. See Dennis Deletant, "'Taunting the Bear': Romania and the Warsaw Pact, 1963–89," *Cold War History* 7, no. 4 (2007), 495–507. For an account of the anticlimax of Ceaușescu's post-1968 rule, see Pavel Câmpăanu, *Ceaușescu: The Countdown* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

³ In January 1968, at the Twelfth Central Committee Plenum, the Greek Communist Party split between the pro-Soviet Kostas Kollyannis faction and the exponents of an anti-Stalinist platform. The latter had close relations with militants jailed by the colonels' dictatorship (the best known was Leonidas Kyrkos). In 1969, the KKE (Interior) was represented at the Tenth RCP Congress by former EDA (Union of Democratic Left) leaders Haralambos Drakopoulos and Antonis Brillakis. The person in charge of Greek and Spanish communist affairs within the Romanian Central Committee was Ghizela Vass, a party veteran and head for more than twenty years of the party's international department. Her deputy was Stefan Andrei, later to serve as Ceaușescu's foreign minister.

that criticizing the Soviet invasion would not result in any deviation from the orthodox line: "We stand here before you as communists and anti-fascists who survived the jails, who faced death, but who never betrayed the interests of the proletariat, the interests of our people. Rest assured, comrades, rest assured, citizens of Romania, that we will never betray our motherland, we will never betray the interests of the people."⁴ Ceaușescu insisted upon the impeccable internationalist credentials of the Romanian leadership, four days later, in a session of the RCP's Executive Committee. For the Romanian leader, his party's solidarity with Czechoslovakia and the opposition to the invasion was a natural expression of commitment to Leninist principles. He was therefore outraged by the Soviet suggestions that people who fought their entire lives on various fronts of the world communist movement could turn out now to be agents of American imperialism, counter-revolutionaries, and enemies of socialism. Of course, it was not a bad thing either that, in making such an argument, Ceaușescu also highlighted the "glorious pages" of the Romanian communists' clandestine struggle against the reaction both at home and abroad:

Our comrades fought with most of them [the Czechoslovak leaders] in Spain and fought together with [Ludvik] Svoboda on the front. We know these people. They risked their lives so many times in difficult situations. How can we believe that today they want to sell Czechoslovakia to imperialism, when we know them and saw them on the battlefield where they could have been killed at any moment? Today they are party leaders and we do not know what could have led them to carry on an inimical counter-revolutionary activity. They should be helped to better organize themselves.⁵

Generally speaking, we argue that the ostensible solidarity with Czechoslovakia's "socialism with a human face" justified the perpetuation of an obtuse, narcissistic, and hyper-centralized model of an increasingly

⁴ *Scînteia*, August 22, 1968.

⁵ "Stenograma întâlnirii Comitetului Executiv al Comitetului Central al PCR, 21 august 1968," ANIC, fond CC al PCR/Cancelarie, dosar nr. 133/1968, ff. 16–36.

personal dictatorship. In his report to the RCP's Tenth Congress, held August 6–12, 1969, Ceaușescu insisted that the fundamental goal of the party's strategy was the economic development of the country and the creation of a "multilaterally developed socialist society." This concept, the Romanian counterpart to the Soviet ideological shibboleth of "real existing socialism," was presented as a major theoretical breakthrough. The pretense was that the notion was far more comprehensive than the Soviet vision, including not only social and economic components, but also the human-civilizational ones.⁶ Ceaușescu extolled the creation of the Socialist Unity Front, an all-encompassing political organization that included the trade unions and women's and youth organizations; practically every citizen above the age of eighteen became a member of the Socialist Unity Front. The signal of the growing resurgence of Zhdanovist obscurantism was the publication of the July 1971 theses. Starting from these "proposals for the improvement of ideological activity," a radical re-Stalinization followed, accompanied by an unprecedented cult of personality. The regime gave up on trying to emulate "socialism with a human face" as it focused on "strengthening the unity between the party and the people so that our socialist society, our nation, will be united and will unwaveringly follow as one the party line." By the end of the sixties, Ceaușescu was proclaiming the omnipotence of the RCP's vision of the world. All citizens of the socialist commonwealth had to bring their "own contribution to the triumph of our conception about the world and human life."⁷ He was in fact officially declaring the new Romanian *Weltanschauung*staat.

⁶ A point made by sociologist Miron Constantinescu, candidate member of the Political Executive Committee and Central Committee secretary, at his inaugural lecture at the University of Bucharest, September 1970. About Constantinescu's convoluted career, see Vladimir Tismaneanu, "Miron Constantinescu sau povestea imposibilei erezii," in *Arheologia Terorii*, 3rd ed. (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2008), 243–249; and Ștefan Bosomitu, "Miron Constantinescu—Profilul intelectualului angajat," in *Intelectualii și regimul communist: istoriile unei relații*, Anuarul Institutului de Investigare a Crimelor Comunismului în România (Bucharest: Polirom, 2009), 167–194.

⁷ "Fragment din stenograma întâlnirii dintre Nicolae Ceaușescu și oamenii de cultura și artă," ANIC, fond CC al PCR—Cancelarie, 14/1971, f. 3–124 in Alina Pavelescu and Laura Dumitru, eds., *PCR și intelectualii în primii ani ai regimului Ceaușescu* (Bucharest: Arhivele Naționale ale României, 2007), 293–297.

Three days after the invasion of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact troops and on the anniversary date of the “anti-fascist insurgency,” at a carefully staged session of the Great National Assembly session, on August 23, 1968, the Romanian communist leader, Nicolae Ceaușescu, emphatically argued:

Whom was this military intervention aimed at? Against the legal, leading bodies of the communist party and Czechoslovak state. Were these institutions threatening socialism in Czechoslovakia, the latter’s independence and sovereignty? But does the fact that the Czechoslovak people wishes to live free and independent, sovereign in its own home, and in ever-strengthening alliance and collaboration with other socialist countries... are all these endangering socialism? Since when did the principles of socialist democracy, the humanism, of the socialist relationships become counter-revolutionary dangers?⁸

The above statement is one of the most clear-cut interpretations of the Prague Spring by the Romanian side. One can identify a few essential concepts that are associated with this political reform movement: legality, sovereignty, democracy, and international co-operation. For the RCP leadership, the Czechoslovak crisis became entirely associated with the various meanings of these four terms. Therefore, the key to understanding the complexities of the year 1968 in Romania lies in the clarification of their significance in the regime’s ideological self-definition.

The present paper pursues an alternative reading of 1968, one explicitly different from the still-prevailing perspective in Romania. An article from Romania’s largest-circulation daily, *Țurnalul Național*, is characteristic of the mainstream representation of the event:

August 21, 1968, will remain marked with golden letters in the history of the Bucharest communist regime [...] Ceaușescu’s opposition to the intervention could have cost him his throne. Nothing happened; it was just remembered as an act of bravery, by which Romania gained the world’s attention, while

⁸ “Lucrările sesiunii extraordinare a Marii Adunări Naționale. Cuvântarea tovarășului Nicolae Ceaușescu,” *Scînteia*, August 23, 1968.

Ceaușescu earned the label of a great leader of a small but courageous country.”

To add insult to injury, the title of that article was “Motherland in Danger!”⁹ Many such productions could be found in 2008 in most major newspapers and weeklies. If nostalgic revisionism can explain most of this production, it would be no shock to find out that resurgent national(ist) pride is behind the success of such journalistic pieces.

The authors of the present article believe that 1968, in Romania, was not the watershed year so frequently invoked by the literature. It was, instead, a climactic moment in a protracted process of national reassertion that had begun in the second half of the 1950s. In other words, the perpetuation of dogmatic practices, policies, and people along with the pseudo-reformist gestures was the hallmark of this self-styled Romanian response to the challenges of de-Stalinization. One must add to the list the party-state appropriation of nationalist themes, motifs, and symbols. It all generated, by the end of the 1960s, the expectation for systemic change along the lines of the Czechoslovak model. And indeed the RCP leaders took such a blueprint into consideration, provoking a thaw-like atmosphere.¹⁰ However, while appar-

⁹ “Cristina Diac, “Patria e în pericol!,” *Jurnalul Național*, August 20, 2008. The same author wrote another piece entitled “The Day of National Pride,” in which she furthered the redemptive narrative of 1968 as a moment of national rebirth: “History remembered his protest as a courageous act. Because of it, Romania won the consideration of the entire Western world and Ceaușescu the qualification of a great leader of small, but valiant country.” Her article was included in a 2009 book that gathered all the materials produced by the daily *Jurnalul Național*: Lavinia Betea, ed., *21 august 1968. Apoteoza lui Ceaușescu* (Bucharest: Polirom, 2009). Lucian Boia diagnosed the sort of *topos* employed by this type of materials as the myth of the “fourth world power”: “a small country was transfigured into a great country; a country at the margin of the great political-economic ensembles became a nucleus of the world.” See Lucian Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness* (Budapest and New York: CEU Press, 1997), 183.

¹⁰ One of the most inquisitive students of Romanian communism, Kenneth Jowitt, wrote that, between 1967 and 1970, one could identify in Romania “some evidence of a balanced and integrated appreciation of the nation-state as a unit marked by continuities and decisive changes.” See Kenneth Jowitt, *New World Disorder: The Leninist Extinction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 110. His remark is, however, rather counterin-

ently speaking the same language as the Prague '68ers, that of socialist legality, democracy, of the national road, and of anti-hegemonism, the RCP did not mean the same things. By comparing the political discourses and considering the strategic choices of both cases, we show how the betrayed promises of 1968 illustrated the inherent ambiguity of Romania's "autonomous course." Moreover, these never-substantiated promises functioned as one of the regime's enduring points of self-legitimization. Symptomatically, the same betrayed promises continue to inspire post-communist nostalgias for the bygone days of the "heroic defense of the Fatherland." Paul Cornea, an influential literary historian and a disenchanted former communist ideologue, provided an excellent evaluation of the speech's impact:

It was an impressive demonstration, which surpassed my expectations, one of Ceaușescu's strangest public appearances, if one is to judge it from the point of view of his other performances and of its reception along the years. (...) This time his rhetoric was dramatic, intensely passionate with a contagious effect. He could barely suppress his indignation when speaking about the infamous attack against Czechoslovakia, which he branded as outside international law and in violation of the equality between socialist nations. And we all listened and we all shared his revolt, overcame with a suffocating emotion. We felt as if we were militants for a sacred cause. We were ready, if asked, to prove by deed our commitment.¹¹

Both the population's and the foreign observers' infatuation with the foreign-policy stand of the regime (whose side effects are still felt) misled many into ignoring the true dynamics within the Romanian communist regime: a budding personality cult, a re-strengthening of the party,

tuitive: those three years cannot be taken out of the context of the *whole* process of nationalist enchantment of Romanian communist (from the late 1950s until the end of the regime). Another issue that needs to be tackled is the type of visions of the nation taken on by the RCP's political discourse: the nationalism of the sixties was duplicating to a large extent the atavistic propensities of the nationalist discourse of the inter-war period.

¹¹ Paul Cornea, "1968—la Paris și la Praga," *Observator Cultural*, no. 425, May 2008.

the secret police, and of propaganda controls; a new cultural orthodoxy, a sort of updated Zhdanovism, and last but not least, a propensity to an “I’ll do it my way” attitude, soon to turn into full-fledged autarchy.

In the late 1960s, influential Western media portrayed Nicolae Ceaușescu as something of a maverick. It was fashionable in the late 1960s to discover Ceaușescu’s “autonomy” in foreign policy and credit him with a genuine commitment to Romanian national values. The myth of Romanian “national communism” was hastily shaped, with Ceaușescu presented as the symbol of this challenge to Moscow’s domination of East-Central Europe. The Romanian leader’s disenchantment with the USSR had started with Khrushchev’s attack on Stalin. For Ceaușescu, as for Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, Enver Hoxha, Mátyás Rákosi, Mao Zedong, Walter Ulbricht, Maurice Thorez, Alvaro Cunhal, Enrique Lister, and many other seasoned Stalinists, Khrushchev’s de-Stalinization amounted to shattering communist unity. Compelled to choose between the USSR and Stalin, Dej and Ceaușescu willingly chose the latter.¹² Ceaușescu thus adamantly pursued a national Stalinist orientation after his master, Gheorghiu-Dej, passed away in March 1965. Ceaușescu imprinted on it the marks of his personality, notably a tremendous interest in self-promotion and international recognition. As for Ceaușescu’s Yugoslav proclivities,

¹² Note in this respect the difference between Ceaușescu and veteran communist ideologue Iosif Chișinevski, a Politburo member purged in 1957 and former adamant Stalinist, who, in the aftermath of Khrushchev’s secret speech, proposed a minor thaw in Romania. See Chișinevski’s son’s letter to Vladimir Tismaneanu about the rationale of his father’s actions in 1956–1958 in *Studii și materiale de istorie contemporană* 7, 2008, 191–197, and Alina Tudor and Dan Cătănuș, eds., *O destalinizare ratată. Culisele cazului Miron Constantinescu-Iosif Chișinevski* (Bucharest: Editura Elion, 2001). It is interesting to note the similarity between the Dej-Ceaușescu approach, culminating in the national-Stalinist “heresy,” and the Natolin faction within the Polish United Workers’ Party (anti-liberalism, anti-intellectualism, anti-Semitism). For the latter case, see Andrzej Paczkowski’s *The Spring Will Be Ours: Poland and the Poles from Occupation to Freedom* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 270–278. As for Chișinevski and his then-ally Miron Constantinescu, their behavior was comparable to the anti-Stalinist about-face of militants like Roman Zambrowski and Stefan Staszewski in Poland. See Teresa Toranska, *Oni: Stalin’s Polish Puppets*, translated from the Polish by Agnieszka Kołakowska; with an introduction by Harry Willetts (London: Collins Harvill, 1987).

they had more to do with Tito's non-aligned policy than with any interest in developing a Romanian version of "self-management." Even Ceaușescu's conspicuous cult of personality was attributed to the need to cement an image of unity and cohesion against possible Soviet attempts to violate Romania's alleged independence.

The Ninth RCP Congress represented the point at which the most important ideological and political options of Nicolae Ceaușescu's socialism were defined. Among these were the thesis of the social and ethnic homogenization of the Romanian nation; the stress on industrialization and the maximum use of domestic resources; the view of the party leader as a symbol of monolithic unity of the party and the people; active neutrality inside the world communist movement; re-establishment of cordial relations with some Western communist parties, especially the Spanish and Italian ones, in the effort to solidify a joint line in opposition to Moscow's hegemonic maneuvers; and the rhetoric of internal democracy, associated with the image of Ceaușescu as the champion of legality, justice, ethics, and socialist equity. At this congress Ceaușescu formulated one of the defining principles of his regime:

For a long time to come the nation and the State will continue to be the basis of the deployment of socialist society. The development of the nation, the consolidation of the socialist State comply with the objective requirements of social life; not only does this not run counter to the interests of socialist internationalism, but, on the contrary, it fully corresponds to these interests, to the solidarity of the working people, to the cause of socialism and peace. The development and flourishing of each socialist nation, of each socialist state, equal rights, sovereign and independent, is an essential requirement upon which depend the strengthening of the unity and cohesion of the socialist countries, the growth of their influence upon mankind's advance toward socialism and communism.¹³

Such tenets were strengthened by the May 7, 1966, speech that Ceaușescu delivered on the occasion of the forty-fifth anniversary of

¹³ Nicolae Ceaușescu, *Report at the Ninth Congress of the Romanian Communist Party* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1965), 60.

the party's foundation. Here he strongly criticized the influence of the Comintern and the practice of imposing both the leadership and the party line from abroad. Significantly, he also condemned the communists' handling of the Social-Democrat and the Socialist Independent parties.¹⁴ By 1968, these theses were the fundamentals of the RCP's position within the world communist movement.

To turn to mirror-imaging the two cases, Romanian and Czechoslovak, one needs to emphasize that both parties envisaged the second half of the 1960s as one of national awakening or rebirth. For example, at the Central Committee's plenary session, Dubček stated that "at the moment, our main task is the deepening and the founding on a correct basis of the rebirth process."¹⁵ Similarly, in an editorial in the party newspaper *Scînteia*, N. Corbu and Constantin Mitea empathically argued that "forging and nourishing the socialist nation are the end result of the tremendous structural transformations that affected the life of the Romanian people, who nowadays walk proudly and confidently on the world stage."¹⁶ These triumphant assessments could arguably make sense only in the context of a departure from the pre-1960s past; that is, they were conditioned by de-Stalinization.

The primary aspect of such process was the re-appraisal of socialist legality, with its implicit aspect of rehabilitation politics. Both in Czechoslovakia and in Romania there had been initiatives along these lines before. In Czechoslovakia, the 1955–1957 and 1962–1963 commissions were inconsistent in their results and neglected to make an overall analysis of the causes underlying the Stalinist trials. Only

¹⁴ Paul Niculescu-Mizil, *De la Comintern la comunism național* (Bucharest: Editura Evenimentul Românesc, 2001), 23.

¹⁵ "Raportul prezentat de tovarășul Alexander Dubček la plenara CC al PC din Cehoslovacia," *Scînteia*, April 3, 1968.

¹⁶ Nicolae Corbu și Constantin Mitea, "Dezvoltarea națiunii și internaționalismul," *Scînteia*, January 24, 1968. Nicolae Corbu was a veteran Stalinist journalist, deputy editor of the party newspaper *Scînteia* and one of Ceaușescu's speechwriters. Constantin Mitea was also deputy editor of *Scînteia* and, in the 1980s, became one of Ceaușescu's chief personal advisers and a member of the Central Committee. After 1989, both Corbu and Mitea engaged in efforts to portray Ceaușescu as a genuine patriot betrayed by vicious agents of foreign powers. They published these venomous diatribes in *Totuși iubirea*, a weekly run by former chief sycophant, poet Adrian Păunescu.

the second Piller Commission (named after its chairman, Presidium member Jan Piller) succeeded in clarifying some of the causes and dynamics of the purge trials.¹⁷ In Romania, however, rehabilitation was instead a means of rewriting history for purposes of legitimization. The first stage in the “making sense” of its own traumatic past was the RWP’s November 30–December 5, 1961, Plenum of the Central Committee. Gheorghiu-Dej was offered the golden opportunity to engage in pseudo-liberalization. Whatever was wrong in party history, he candidly claimed, had happened either before he joined the top leadership or against his will. Pretending to be the true defender of Leninist principles of collective leadership and “healthy norms of party life,” Gheorghiu-Dej denounced the Pauker-Luca-Georgescu and Chişinevschi-Constantinescu factions as responsible for the Stalinist horrors in Romania. In the same vein, according to Dej, had it not been for him and his close associates, traitors like Ştefan Foriş and Lucreţiu Pătraşcanu would have destroyed the party in the 1940s. A plenum intended to carry out de-Stalinization became an exercise in reinforcing a highly Stalinist approach to party history. In fact, in his speech, Gheorghiu-Dej codified the new official version of the RWP’s (Romanian Workers’ Party’s) history that stressed the abominable actions of the “factional antiparty group” and therefore exonerated the Dejites:

Violations of the Leninist norms of party life, of the principle of collective work in the leading bodies, defiance of the democratic rules of party and state construction, creation of an atmosphere of mistrust and suspicion against valuable party and state cadres, their intimidation and persecution, abuse of power and encroachment of people’s legality characterized the activity of this factional, anti-party group.¹⁸

The 1961 plenum would become a model both for de/re-legitimization of party leadership and for the revitalization of the Romanian style per-

¹⁷ Jiri Pelikán, ed., *The Czechoslovak Political Trials, 1950–1954: The Suppressed Report of the Dubcek Government’s Commission of Inquiry, 1968* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1971).

¹⁸ Gh. Gheorghiu-Dej, *Articole şi cuvântări: June 1960–December 1962* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1963), 278–279.

sonality cult. In April 1968, with the help of his faithful followers in the party apparatus, Ceaușescu unleashed a major myth-substitution operation. The April 22–25, 1968, Plenum of the Central Committee further revealed Ceaușescu's intention of strengthening his legitimacy through a drastic indictment of his predecessor's abuses. Using almost identical wording, Ceaușescu would revise his predecessor's party history tenets and extend the stigma of Stalinist abuse to Dej's and his followers' political decisions. This came, however, with the obvious caveat that Ceaușescu already extricated himself, for he reminded his audience that, by April 1956, he had criticized the idea that the secret police was the one who fought the class enemy. According to him, "the party was the organizer and the leader in the struggle against the enemy." No repressive action could destroy the bourgeoisie or the landowners. "Only the revolutionary activity of transforming society and of building socialism can guarantee victory in this struggle." This is an odd statement by Ceaușescu, considering his deep involvement in the 1956 repression against those who manifested solidarity with the Hungarian Revolution. Moreover, the abuses of those years had three sources: 1) the party context existing after August 23, when factional infighting dominated; 2) political and cultural, moral backwardness; 3) the ignorance of the organizational norms of the party. The new leader of the RCP felt compelled to declare:

None of Gheorghiu-Dej's merits can make up for his abuses and for his responsibility in Pătrășcanu's assassination, and in the many illegal attitudes toward other state and party *aktiv*. [...] We need no idols. We don't need to turn people into standard bearers. Marxism-Leninism rejects, and will reject, these types of ideas, for they are foreign to the working class. Our standard-bearer is Marxism-Leninism, our vision of the world and about the life of the proletariat.¹⁹

Ironically this statement came from the man who, just a few years later, would develop a personality cult that could have made Stalin blush.

¹⁹ "Cuvântarea tovarășului Nicolae Ceaușescu la adunarea activului de partid din Capitală," *Scînteia*, 28 April, 1968. All the other short quotes on the page are from this document.

Similarly to December 1961, when the main goal of the Central Committee session was to inscribe and praise Gheorghiu-Dej's role in the history of the party,²⁰ the April 1968 Plenum was meant to create a new symbolic hierarchy, a new demonology (with Dej as a chief villain) and a counter-mythology with Ceaușescu as the genuine restorer of truth, dignity, and justice.²¹

One of the conclusions of this session and the others that preceded or followed it was that "the abuses and crimes are not permanent companions of socialism, but phenomena alien to socialism and having nothing in common with it."²² In contrast to the Czechoslovaks, the RCP did not associate these deformations with the idea of a crisis. Prime Minister Oldřich Černík, in a televised speech in July 1968, stated, "We have decided, once and for all, to renounce all those systems that generated a profound crisis by discrediting more and more in the eyes of the people the ideas of socialism."²³ Previously, in April 1968, Alexander Dubček pledged that the Communist Party would "do its best to remove any shadow of the mistrust and humiliation to which the families and relatives of those affected were often subjected, and will resolutely ensure that such persecuted people have ever opportunity of showing their worth in work, in public life, and in political activities."²⁴ Palmiro Togliatti, in his 1964 Yalta Memorandum, already expressed this point of view, namely, that one should carefully assess any pretense of success and progress in the aftermath of Stalinism: "the worst thing would be to give the impression that all goes well and afterwards we suddenly find ourselves faced with and forced to

²⁰ Paul Niculescu-Mizil, *O istorie trăită* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 1997), 26–27.

²¹ Alexandru-Murad Mironov, "Putere și politică în România lui Nicolae Ceaușescu—Reabilitările din aprilie 1968," *Arhivele Totalitarismului*, no. 46–47, 1–2 (2005), 169–190.

²² "Cuvântarea tovarășului Nicolae Ceaușescu la adunarea activului de partid din Capitală," *Scînteia*, April 28, 1968.

²³ "Cuvântarea lui O. Černík la televiziune," *Scînteia*, July 21, 1968.

²⁴ "Speech delivered by Comrade Alexander Dubcek at the Plenary Session of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia on April 1st, 1968," in Paul Ello, ed., *Czechoslovakia's Blueprint for Freedom: Dubcek's Statements—The Original and Official Documents Leading to the Conflict of August 1968* (Washington, DC: Acropolis Books, 1968), 123.

talk about difficult situations previously unacknowledged.”²⁵ It is no surprise that, in his reply to the Warsaw Pact letter, Dubček voiced dismay at the pretense of the five signatories for an uneventful socialist modernization in the context of prior Stalinist excesses:

The leading role of our party gravely suffered in the past by the distortions of the ‘50s and the policy of their inconsistent removal by the leadership headed by A. Novotný. He is even more responsible for the deepening of the social conflicts between Czechs and Slovaks, between the intelligentsia and workers, between the young generation and the older generations. The inconsistent solution of economic problems has left us in a condition in which we cannot solve a series of justified economic demands of the workers and... the effectiveness of the entire national economy is gravely disrupted. Under that leadership the confidence of the masses in the party dropped and there were expressions of criticism and resistance, but all this was “solved” by interference from a position of power against justified dissatisfaction, against criticism and against attempts to solve consistently the social problems in the interests of the party and in the interests of its leading role. The decline in the confidence in the party was masked by external forms of directive party control. Although this regime was given out as being the firm guarantee of the interests of the entire Socialist camp, inside problems were growing... the real solution of which was suppressed by forceful means against those advocates of the new and creative approaches.²⁶

This sort of sweeping assessment of the previous two decades of communist rule in a country cannot be found in Romania. In an analysis of A. Drăghici’s failed *samokritika*, Ceaușescu clearly stated that “what happened during those years at the Minister of Internal Affairs, the abuses and illegalities perpetrated there, do not in any way repre-

²⁵ Palmiro Togliatti, “Notă memorială asupra problemelor mișcării muncitorești internaționale și ale unității sale,” *Lupta de Clasă* (September 1964), 82–92.

²⁶ Fragments from the July 18 Czechoslovak response to the joint letter of the five communist governments in Vojtech Mastny, ed., *Czechoslovakia: Crisis in World Communism* (New York: Facts on File, 1972), 40–47.

sent our party-line.” To make a grotesque picture complete, one of the people who offered an insightful description of the Czechoslovak crisis was Valter Roman, a Spanish Civil War and Comintern veteran and a central figure of the Agitprop Department (director of the Party Publishing House). He was a member of an RWP delegation to Budapest in November 1956 and one of the “emissaries” (along with Nicolae Goldberger, a deputy director of the Party History Institute, and Iosif Ardeleanu, the head of the Censorship—the Directorate for Press and Printed Publications) who sought to extort confessions from the members of the Imre Nagy government during the latter’s political asylum and then arrest in Snagov, Romania.²⁷ An expert in about-faces, Roman brashly stated before the Braşov County party *aktiv* in October 1968:

Unfortunately, the old party leadership [in Czechoslovakia] followed a line that did not continue this people’s traditions and which did not develop this country’s already existing democracy. The principles of the dictatorship of the proletariat were understood in a manner entirely opposite to their real meaning. They set up a regime that slowly but surely liquidated an array of liberties that were already in place at the time. You [to the audience] can easily realize how the people could react, a working class that in the bourgeois regime already experienced democratic freedom and now could see them disappear in a socialist regime. Of course, the situation is different in countries where, like in our country (we know the facts in Romania or in Hungary, Poland, or Bulgaria), democracy was seriously limping and where democracy is ever developing, though not at all times with valiant leaps. This truly gave our working class the feeling that what had been was overcome and that now it is experiencing something new along the lines of socialist democracy.²⁸

²⁷ Imre Nagy, *Însemnări de la Snagov. Corespondența, rapoarte, convorbiri*, note și studio introductive de Ileana Ioanid (Bucharest: Polirom, 2004).

²⁸ “Stenograma expunerii lui Valter Roman, Lector al CC al PCR, în fața activului de partid al Comitetului Județean” Braşov, October 1968. This important, previously unpublished document was offered to Vladimir Tismaneanu by Valter Roman’s son, Petre Roman, the former prime minister of Romania.

Following his rationale, one could, therefore, infer that despite of the birth pangs of the communist regime in Romania, real democracy did eventually surface at the top of the heap. To paraphrase Roman, in this country, unlike in Czechoslovakia, there was no cancer growing on the healthy body of the republic and on its people. The party was never wrong; it could be just misled. It pursued a heroic activity and when it dreamed most pleasantly, it was faced with the bitter reality that rogues like Drăghici (and sometimes Dej) fed it the wrong information, on the basis of which heroes such as Pătrășcanu were sacrificed. In Prague, the Piller Commission recommended "that none of the Party leaders, Security officers or members of the legal profession who had any part in preparing and conducting the political trials, or in the re-assessments of 1955–7, shall ever again hold high Party or Government office or work in Security or in the legal profession."²⁹ Despite a rebuttal of some of the members of Dej's politburo, Ceaușescu did nothing (at least not immediately) to force the resignation or retirement of notorious party hacks such as Bodnăraș, Răutu, Trofin, Stoica, Patilineț, etc. On the contrary, the last two were members of the Central Committee Commission that evaluated the rehabilitations. Moreover, Teohari Georgescu, one of those rehabilitated, was none other than the minister of internal affairs during the years of "high Stalinism" (1944–1952).

Ironically, only four months after the April 1968 Central Committee Plenum, the RCP leadership summoned a major gathering to celebrate twenty years since the creation of the *Securitate*. The communiqué of the event announced that, by State Council Decree, over 1,100 members of the *Securitate* were to receive RSR medals for their "long-standing activity in the ranks of this organization and for their significant merits in the defense of the Romanian people's revolutionary conquests."³⁰ In the RCP lexicon, socialist legality meant that "the unswerving defense of the citizen's and society's liberties and interests must be doubled, with equivalent vigor, by the punishment of those guilty of acts detrimental to the people's and the state's general interest." Such possibility of counter-revolutionary activity therefore justi-

²⁹ Jiri Pelikan, *ibid.*, 248.

³⁰ "Adunarea festivă consacrată aniversării a 20 de ani de la înființarea securității statului," *Scînteia*, August 30, 1968.

fied the leader's appeal on August 30 for an enhancement of the *Securitate* vigilance, as the latter was "the nation's trusty shield."³¹ It was no surprise, then, that the two highest priorities of the newly adopted Penal Code were the defense of the state's security and of its capacity for defense, and the widening and consolidation of socialist property. The socialist legality of 1968 in Romania was just another stage in the party's "twenty-year long activity during which Romania and the Romanian people only went forward." With Marxist theorist Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea's dictum in mind, namely that "socialism cannot survive without the truth," the RCP propagandistically reasserted itself as "the party of justice and truth, which it unconditionally serves."³² From the point of view of the new communist leadership, Romanian de-Stalinization was already a case closed. Further doubts about the party's role could only be signs of deviation from its line or anti-patriotic attacks against the socialist order.

One cannot help but wonder: how did the RCP so skillfully avoid the crisis Czechoslovakia was marred in? The answer is simple: the RCP never renounced the fundamental tenets of Leninism. In Czechoslovakia, Cestmir Cisař, secretary of the Central Committee, delivered his remarkable May 6, 1968, speech, on the 150th anniversary of the birth of Marx, in which he deemed unacceptable the "monopolistic interpretation" of Marx by Lenin. His main argument was that "it created a rift in the world communist movement which could only be healed if the monopolistic interpreters changed their ways."³³ There was no such heresy in Romania. On the ninety-eighth anniversary of Lenin's birth, a front-page editorial in *Scînteia* spared no praise for Lenin as the one who truly fulfilled Marx and Engels' teachings:

³¹ Gheorghe Petrescu, "Întărirea legalității—element esențial al democrației socialiste," *Scînteia*, April 18, 1968.

³² Adrian Dimitriu, "Legalitatea socialistă este unică pentru toți cetățenii patriei," *Scînteia*, April 29, 1968.

³³ On June 14, 1968, Academician Fyodor Konstantinov answered Cisař in *Pravda*, who argued that only the enemies of "socialism" could dispute Leninism's universal validity. G.R. Urban, ed., *Communist Reformation: Nationalism, Internationalism and Change in the World Communist Movement* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), 91–92.

Lenin's historical merit consists not only in the fact that he defended Marxism against its adversaries [read: revisionists], but also in the fact that he showed, like no other, the creative vitality of Marx and Engels' teachings, to which any dogma or ossification are foreign and which are readily adjustable to reality, to novelty, and are permanently opened to being enriched by the conclusions provided by life, by socialist development and revolutionary practice."³⁴

The main difference between the two positions is that the first rejects altogether Lenin's universally applicable mediation of Marxism, while the second accepts it and focuses on Leninism as practice. This is the sole adjustment that the RCP made to its interpretation of orthodoxy. It adjusted it to its own "developmental tasks" (Jowitt). The objectives remain unchanged: the revolutionary ideal of the exploiting classes' overthrow, the political takeover by the working class allied with the peasantry, the building of socialist order, or the struggle against imperialist reaction.³⁵ The party maintained its vanguard role because it encompassed the most advanced workers, peasants, intellectuals, the best sons of the socialist nation who never ceased militating for the implementation of the party-state decisions.

Contrary to popular opinion, the April 1968 Plenum of the Central Committee of the RCP did not limit itself to political rehabilitations of repressed party members. The second main discussion point for that meeting was that of "socialist education and the intensification of the political-ideological activity." Upon the completion of the session, the Central Committee proudly concluded that "the defining features of the Romanian Communist Party are the unshakable unity around the Central Committee, the total adherence of all its members to both its domestic and external policies, and the selfless work for the accomplishment of building socialism in our motherland."³⁶ Just a few days earlier, before the publication of this statement, Dumitru Popes-

³⁴ "Spiritul creator veșnic viu al leninismului, *Scînteia*," April 21, 1968.

³⁵ "Cuvîntarea tovarășului Dumitru Popescu la aniversarea a 98 de ani de la nașterea lui I. V. Lenin," *Scînteia*, April 21, 1968.

³⁶ "Informarea Comitetului Executiv al CC al PCR cu privire la compoziția partidului, la întărirea continuă a rândurilor sale și intensificarea activității de educare a comuniștilor," *Scînteia*, April 25, 1968.

cu, in an already quoted *Scînteia* editorial, practically equated Leninism and the RCP, arguing that the former's fundamental elements were the latter's essential features.

The effects of the regime's re-radicalization (instead of de-radicalization) in Romania became evident under conditions of Soviet pressure during the troubled days of the second half of August 1968. The tensions generated by the five Warsaw Pact countries' intervention in Czechoslovakia exacerbated a certain anxiety among the top elite and led to a fast redistribution of top positions and power relations within the regime. From that moment on, Ceaușescu ceased to be the *primus inter pares* and acquired the position of an undisputed *lidero maximo* (*Conducător*). The latent paranoid style of communist politics in Romania re-activated itself when the fortress came under siege. The subjective motivation behind Ceaușescu's balcony speech can be found in Gheorghiu-Dej's prior strategic initiatives. If one is to believe Paul Niculescu-Mizil's account of the preparations for the 1964 Declaration, one can easily notice the reactive character of both acts. Dej supposedly stated that "we are always on the defensive. All the others advance all sorts of proposals and petitions, to which we are forced to say no. We must leave this position. We must initiate the offensive ourselves. Others will be forced to say no."³⁷ Once again, a still-tentative communist elite, though increasingly confident as the months passed by, decided to take a bold stand. It subsequently acquired large amounts of "charismatic" legitimacy under circumstances of a severe centrifugal crisis within the world communist movement. The original Bolshevik principle of wartime mobilization was rejuvenated in August 1968 in Romania, and it was reinstated as the basis for the reorganization of society. The specter of a Soviet invasion, never sustained by archival evidence, offered an "exemplary enemy" without which communism would have lost its pathos, as ultimately happened across the entire Soviet bloc.³⁸

³⁷ Niculescu-Mizil, *O istorie...*, 17–19.

³⁸ Nikolay Berdiaev famously stated that "the communist cannot live without an enemy, without the feeling of hostility to that enemy, he loses his *pathos* when that enemy does not exist, and if there is no enemy he must invent one." See Nicolas Berdyaev, *The Origin of Russian Communism*, trans. R.M. French (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960), 183–184.

What also came about was a resurgence of the “party of the new type” and the assertion of a leader, whose cult was already showing its first signs in public manifestations. Two meetings of the Executive Committee, on August 21 and 25, are indicative of the reloading of the leader and the party. The latter is presented as molded upon the people, the two being organically linked to each other. This new thesis of organicity actually meant that the features and the heritage of the nation were truly fulfilled and put into practice only with the help of and by the party. This is how the nation was *cemented* (Corbu and Mitea) during the building of socialism. The people could therefore all answer as one to the party’s call—a self-serving explanation for the August speech in the Central Committee square and stepping-stone to the regime’s later carnivalesque counterfeit support. The party-nation became “a wall around the Central Committee, around comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu, in order to defend our sacred motherland” (Măneasa Mănescu). “The only true position and the only correct path to follow were those advanced by the Permanent Presidium, those proposed by comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu” (Maxim Berghianu). By the Tenth Party Congress, comrade Ceaușescu accumulated the position of secretary general, president of the State Council, president of Socialist Unity Front, and commander-in-chief. We can, therefore, clearly point to the beginning of a personality cult based upon “an iron discipline, a monolithic unity around the party, the Central Committee, and comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu.” The leader, the party, and the people became “an unconquerable fortress.”³⁹ Ceaușescu was portrayed as the historical phenomenon capable of supplying the central promise of utopian, collective renewal through national struggle. And, to use a characterization employed by Richard Overy in his seminal study *The Dictators*, until the late 1980s, “a great many people (...) had no particular grounds for not believing the reality they were presented with.”⁴⁰

³⁹ Stenograma întâlnirii Comitetului Executiv al Comitetului Central al PCR, August 21, 1968, *ibid.*; Stenograma întâlnirii Comitetului Executiv al Comitetului Central al PCR, August 25, 1968, ANIC, fond CC al PCR/Cancelarie, dosar nr. 135/1968, ff. 6–29.

⁴⁰ Richard Overy, *The Dictators: Hitler’s Germany and Stalin’s Russia* (London/New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 648–649.

Ceaușescu's success depended on total support from the mid-level party apparatus, a social group aspiring to replace Gheorghiu-Dej's cohorts. These were apparatchiks whose careers under Gheorghiu-Dej had been linked with Ceaușescu's influential position as secretary of the Central Committee charged with organizational affairs (cadres) formed the latter's power base in the party. His election, at the Ninth Congress (1965), as general secretary, was a clear change from Dej's official position of first secretary. The result was directly linked to Ceaușescu's announcement that the old Politburo was to be replaced by two new bodies: a permanent (standing) presidium and an executive committee. The resemblance to the Chinese model of a large politburo with a small inner circle called the standing committee was striking. The primary aim was to eliminate Dej's close allies and party old-timers Alexandru Moghioroș and Petre Borilă from the top of the pyramid—that is, the permanent presidium—although they remained members of the executive committee. Another important goal was the enlargement of the leading group with the inclusion on the executive committee of Paul Niculescu-Mizil, Gheorghe Rădulescu, and Constantin Drăgan. Another, less important objective was the appointment of Iosif Banc, Maxim Berghianu, Petre Blajovici, Mihai Gere, Petre Lupu, and Ilie Verdeț, former subordinates of Ceaușescu's in the organizational branch of the Central Committee (*Direcția Organizatorică*), as candidate members of the executive committee and the secretariat. Furthermore, by bringing important world communist figures,⁴¹ including leaders of parties in acerbic ideological competition, Ceaușescu projected himself as an influential player in these increasingly acute conflicts. All in all, in 1968, the conditions were ripe for a reaffirmation of the unity of the party around its relatively young, ambitious, and increasingly charismatic leader.⁴² In the words of János Fazekas:

⁴¹ Besides Leonid Brezhnev and Deng Xiaoping, the Congress was also attended by Ramiz Alia (number three in Albania), Walter Ulbricht (the East German first secretary and state council president), Todor Zhivkov, Edvard Kardelj, and Dolores Ibarruri (who chaired the Spanish Communist Party in exile).

⁴² For an extensive analysis of the personnel and power dynamics within the RCP, see Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Stalinism for All Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

...in every difficult moment we need the unity of the party, of its leadership, and of the entire people. Now, at least, this is what we need most. This unity exists within our party; there is a party spirit, a Communist spirit, that we have never had before and which makes the mobilization of the entire nation for the defense of socialism in our country possible.⁴³

We turn full circle and cannot help but ask the question to which the answer now seems obvious. Why was Romania not invaded by the Soviets? Why was this specter more distant than many would wish it nowadays? The logical and historically documented answer is: in contrast to Czechoslovakia, Romania challenged the Soviet Union *only* politically, *not* ideologically.⁴⁴ Even the bellicose statements of the RCP leadership were always followed by attempts to appease.⁴⁵ The national communist contract canvassed in the April 1964 Declaration functioned as a shock absorber, discouraging any thought of emulating the Czechoslovak experiment. Their solidarity with Dubček was based on

⁴³ Stenograma întâlnirii Comitetului Executiv al Comitetului Central al PCR, August 21, 1968, *ibid*.

⁴⁴ Kevin Adamson has a similar approach to Romania's attitude in 1968. He develops his argument on the basis of Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Stalinism for all Seasons*. See Kevin Adamson, "Romania and the Prague Spring in 1968: Ceaușescu's Ideological Opportunism and Socialist International Relations" (conference paper).

⁴⁵ For a comprehensive analysis of the archival materials relating to the problem of the possibility of a Soviet intervention in Romania, see Mihnea Berindei, "Ceaușescu et la position singulière de la Roumanie en 1968," in François Fejtó and Jacques Rupnik, eds., *Le Printemps tchécoslovaque 1968* (Brussels: Complexe, 1999), 1919–209. See also Ashby Crowder, "Romanian Interpretations of the Prague Spring. Cadres, Diplomats, and Crisis," *Arhivele Totalitarismului*, no. 56–57, 3–4 (2007), 99–116, and Vasile Palii, "România și criza cehoslovacă. Mecanismele actului decizional din august 1968," *Arhivele Totalitarismului*, no. 56–57, 3–4 (2007), 117–132. Maud Bracke argued that the intervention in Czechoslovakia was also a solution for the Romanian crisis: "the political and military measures against Czechoslovakia were also, for the Soviets, a way of dealing with Romania's autonomous line in foreign policy." It served as a pre-emptive solution, setting the limits of Romanian communist leadership's self-assertiveness. See Maud Bracke, *Which Socialism, Whose Détente? West European Communism and the Czechoslovak Crisis, 1968* (New York and Budapest: CEU Press, 2007), 143.

common rejection of the hegemonic claims of the USSR and not on similarities in domestic politics. Moreover, Ceaușescu and his party apparatus did strive for the type of support that Czechoslovak leaders enjoyed in their own country. He was not willing to go all the way as Dubček did, but he did want to replicate the enthusiasm of an autonomous path to socialism.⁴⁶ In our opinion, this explains the RCP's refusal to accept the label of counter-revolution branded on the Prague Spring by the Warsaw group of five. The August balcony speech clearly expresses this standpoint:

Nobody must assume the role of advisor, of guide in the way socialism is built in another country. It is our belief that in order to truly assert the relationships among socialist countries, among socialist parties, on real Marxist-Leninist basis, one must once and for all put an end to any interference in the domestic affairs of other states, of other parties. (...) It has been said Czechoslovakia is facing the danger of counterrevolution. Maybe the people, who are saying this today, tomorrow will be saying that this meeting as well is an expression of counterrevolutionary tendencies. Our reply to this all is: the entire Romanian people will not allow anybody to step on our motherland soil. (...) We trust that the communist and workers' parties will know how to find ways of swiftly ending this shameful moment in the history of the world revolutionary movement.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ A cautionary note should be made here. Recent archival information from Czech Republic and Slovakia reveals an advance state of the preparations by the Czechoslovak communist leadership to reverse some of the reforms initiated before the summer of 1968. According to Kieran Williams, "on 20 June the Presidium instructed the government to draw up plans for the suppression of any unrest, and on 18 July the interior ministry set up a special 'operational staff' to monitor public order. Three days earlier, the defence ministry had similarly discussed plans for using the army to suppress 'antisocialist' protests. Prime Minister Oldřich Černík set in motion the establishment of detention camps for, as Dubček later put it, the political isolation of people in the event of open uprisings against socialism." See Kieran Williams, "The Prague Spring: From Elite Liberalisation to Mass Movement," in Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe, eds., *Revolution and Resistance in Eastern Europe: Challenges to Communist Rule* (Oxford: Berg, 2006), 104.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

It is no surprise, then, that some of the same people who were deeply involved in the 1956 campaigns domestically and participated in the preparation and implementation of the Soviet intervention in Hungary made sure to distinguish between the two crises. Of course, the identity, internal position, and international coming of age of the Romanian communists by 1968 did create, from a qualitative point of view, a massively different situation than that of 1956. The extent, however, of dialectical cynicism of militants like Valter Roman is truly perplexing:

In the letter [of the “five” in Warsaw] they stated that in Czechoslovakia a counterrevolution was taking place. It is for the first time in an official document when this characterization is made. They compared the situation in Czechoslovakia with that in Hungary in 1956. Such comparison fails to deliver when critically evaluated; one must not confuse the two. What does counterrevolution mean? Counterrevolution means that the counterrevolutionary forces—as it was in Hungary—succeeded in arming themselves and in liquidating popular power, the communist party and in taking over power. The entire state apparatus collapsed in one night under the pressure of counterrevolutionary forces. Communists were massacred, hanged by lamp posts, the Parliament was surrounded. Nothing similar ever happened in Czechoslovakia. Life followed its normal course since January until August 21st (...) It is a blatant lie to say that Czechoslovakia is experiencing counterrevolution.⁴⁸

Nevertheless, the lack of reformist intentions in no way diminished, at the time, the impact of Ceaușescu’s condemnation of the Czechoslovak invasion. Alexander Dubček himself, in his memoirs, admitted:

no matter what happened in the years to come, Ceaușescu’s independent stand at the time required great courage, and it was very important for me under the circumstances. [...] One must realize that we were alone [...] His subsequent refusal to take part in ganging up against us also had a welcome significance for us, of course. [...] I knew that he was no great reformer himself;

⁴⁸ Ibid., 18.

for him it was a matter of pragmatic politics, which he had also applied in recognizing China and Israel.⁴⁹

One cannot underestimate the prestige acquired by the RCP and the country in the aftermath of the August 21 speech. After the difficult years of unrestrained Stalinism, in the context of a gradual reassertion of national values and of more frequent forays of Western culture into Romania, many people chose to see the glass half-full. For them, the reform of Romanian communism was confirmed not by actual internal dynamics, but by the effusion and attention showered over the country by those who marveled at Ceaușescu's solidarity with Dubček, Svoboda, Smrkovský and all the other leaders of the Prague Spring. An eyewitness of these events, Paul Cornea, offers a telling account of the attitudes toward him, as a Romanian in Prague, during his trip there in the autumn of 1968:

From the moment I got out of the train that took me to the Czechoslovak capital up until my departure, absolutely every Czech who found out that I was Romanian enthusiastically greeted, they hugged me, wanted to do me favors, expressed a deeply touching warmth and an immense affection toward our country and its stand against the August 21st invasion. I had no merit in this triumphant welcome, but I would be lying if I were to say that I wasn't proud to be a Romanian.⁵⁰

Unfortunately, the 1968 events gave to Ceaușescu the discursive and symbolic fodder for all his legitimizing campaigns in the years to follow. One sad but significant example is Josef Smrkovský's speech upon his return from the Moscow "negotiations." His speech was published by *Scînteia* on August 31 along with those of Svoboda and Dubček. Two other very important communiqués of the Czech leadership were published in RCP's main newspaper: Cisař's, after his escape from Soviet arrest, and that of the Czechoslovak government members who were in state visit in Yugoslavia during the invasion (after a short stay in Bucharest).

⁴⁹ *Hope Dies Last: The Autobiography of Alexander Dubček*, edited and translated by Jiří Hochman (New York and London: Kodansha International, 1993), 140, 160, and 172.

⁵⁰ Cornea, "1968—la Paris și la Praga."

Smrkovský touches upon two themes that almost instantly became dear-est to Ceaușescu: the myth of the small but proud and valiant nation and the panacea of self-reliance. Smrkovský stated the following:

This is the tragedy of a small nation whose country is situated in an extremely sensitive region of our continent. It is the tragedy of an effort striving for social renewal, the tragedy of those who wish to progress, the tragedy of a people aiming at achieving high and noble ideals. (...) In the present world context, our country must rely only upon its own wisdom and unity, for no other real guarantee is there. United we must stand to all our ability, for this has helped us often times in our history. We must clench our teeth and continue along the path of the ideals that our standard bears since January this year.⁵¹

Considering the fame and legitimacy he acquired, Ceaușescu did manage to suppress for many years any possibility of accountability, both internally and internationally. Smrkovský's words of grief in the aftermath of the invasion gain a radically different weight if we look at the employment of the main themes in the post-1968 dynamics of the Romanian communist dictatorship. Ceaușescu spared no effort during the seventies and eighties in emphasizing Romania's precarious historical-strategic position and the subsequent necessity of promoting autarchic policies. Constant references to absolute national independence, total sovereignty, full equality, and especially non-interference in domestic affairs were indeed the mantra of the Romanian ideology under Ceaușescu. At the same time, the RCP was supposedly undergoing a revolutionary and world-shattering transformative project: "the multilaterally developed socialist society"—the pinnacle of national progress.⁵² Employing 1968 as the moment of the re-foundation of the regime, the RCP succeeded in entrenching the subordination, integra-

⁵¹ "Cuvantarea lui Josef Smrkovsky," *Scînteia*, 31 August 1968.

⁵² For a detailed listing of the radically transformist policies pursued by the Ceaușescu regime in the second half of the sixties and in the later years, see Ruxandra Ivan, ed., *Transformarea socialistă. Politici ale regimului communist între ideologie și administrație* (Bucharest: Polirom, 2009) and Manuela Marin, *Originea și evoluția cultului personalității lui Nicolae Ceaușescu 1965–1989* (Alba Iulia: Altip, 2008).

tion, and homogenization of society, continuing its project of integral politicization of both collective and individual existence. The myth of national renewal gave way to institutionalizing the ethnicization of Romanian communism. The project of the new man was rephrased and refurbished along the lines of an evergreen nation that gave the party the energy to carry out its revolutionary mission:

Only by working and living alongside with the people, only by finding inspiration in the wisdom and experience of the people, incessantly feeding itself [the party] with the people's never-ending strength, the communist party will always maintain its youth, thus being able to lead successfully in the process of the revolutionary transformation of society."⁵³

By 1970s, the RCP was proudly announcing the creation of a new Romanian civilization.⁵⁴ It all ended in a "Golden Age" of delirium, xenophobia, and destitution. Despite the many favorable pages and the heap of praise about Romania's 1968, we conclude by saying that August 21 was the official birth date of a baroque ideology combining Stalinism and fascism.⁵⁵ It was the turning point for the revival (radicalization) of the communist regime in Romania as a neo-totalitarian movement. Indeed, the Romanian Communist Party and Nicolae Ceaușescu found a way to get its people moving and to get things done.⁵⁶

⁵³ *Formarea și dezvoltarea conștiinței socialiste (Culegere Sintetică)* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1978), 73. On the policies adopted by the regime in order to accomplish "the permanent youth of the people," see Gail Kligman, *The Politics of Duplicity: Controlling Reproduction in Ceaușescu's Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

⁵⁴ See Emilio Gentile and Robert Mallett, "The Sacralisation of Politics: Definitions, Interpretations and Reflections on the Question of Secular Religion and Totalitarianism," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 1, no. 1 (2000), 18–55.

⁵⁵ One of the essential features of this strange blend of communism (i.e., national Stalinism) was "a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism." See Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).

⁵⁶ This passage paraphrases Charles de Gaulle as quoted in Tony Judt, *Post-war: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 431.

MARK KRAMER

*The Kremlin, the Prague Spring,
and the Brezhnev Doctrine*

Until the late 1980s, the Soviet Union's determination to preserve communism in East-Central Europe was not in doubt. When communist regimes in Eastern Europe came under violent threat in the 1950s—in East Germany in 1953 and Hungary in 1956—Soviet troops intervened to subdue those challenges. A very different problem arose in 1968, when Czechoslovakia embarked on a dramatic, but entirely peaceful, attempt to change both the internal complexion of communism and many of the basic structures of Soviet–East European relations. This eight-month-long experiment, widely known as the “Prague Spring,” came to a decisive end in August 1968, when hundreds of thousands of Soviet and Warsaw Pact troops invaded Czechoslovakia.

Neither the Soviet Union nor Czechoslovakia exists any longer, but the legacy of the Prague Spring and the Soviet invasion is still being felt. The reforms that took place in Czechoslovakia in 1968 under the leadership of Alexander Dubček offered the first opportunity for an East European communist regime to earn genuine popular support. Moscow's unwillingness to tolerate those reforms ensured that, from then on, stability in the Eastern bloc could be preserved only by the threat of another Soviet invasion.

That threat sufficed to hold the bloc together for more than twenty years, even when tested by severe crises like the one in Poland in 1980–1981. But soon after Mikhail Gorbachev came along and was no longer willing to use military force in Eastern Europe, the whole Soviet bloc collapsed. Because of the legacy of 1968, all the East European regimes still lacked the legitimacy they would have needed to sustain themselves without Soviet military backing. The invasion of Czechoslovakia saved Soviet-style communism in Eastern Europe for more

than two decades, but it could not forestall the eventual demise of the bloc.

This paper draws on recently declassified archival materials and memoirs to provide a reassessment of the 1968 crisis, showing how the confrontation with Czechoslovakia fit into Soviet policy toward Eastern Europe. The paper begins by discussing the context of the 1968 crisis, highlighting trends in Soviet policy in the late 1950s and 1960s. It then turns to the Prague Spring itself, explaining why the bold changes in Czechoslovakia provoked such a harsh reaction in Moscow. Finally, the chapter explores the international and domestic consequences of the Soviet-led invasion, focusing in particular on the promulgation of the “Brezhnev Doctrine,” which set the tone for Soviet–East European relations for the next twenty-one years.

Context of the 1968 Crisis

From November 1956, when Soviet troops crushed a popular uprising in Hungary, to January 1968, when the Prague Spring began, Soviet–East European relations underwent several notable changes. Some developments facilitated greater Soviet control over Eastern Europe and better cohesion among the Warsaw Pact states, but numerous other factors tended to weaken Soviet control and to create fissures within the Eastern bloc.

Sources of Cohesion

From the early 1960s on, the Soviet Union sought to invigorate the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), which had been largely dormant since it was created by Stalin in 1949. Both Nikita Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev hoped to use the CMEA as a means of formally integrating the Soviet and East European economies.¹ The “Basic Principles of Socialist Economic Integration,” announced by

¹ Jozef M. van Brabant, *Socialist Economic Integration: Contemporary Economic Problems in Eastern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), esp. chap. 1; Alan H. Smith, *The Planned Economies of Eastern Europe* (London: Croom Helm, 1983), 174–202; and Michael Kaser, *COMECON: Integration Problems of the Planned Economies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967).

Khrushchev with much fanfare in 1961, did not yield many results in the end; but the Soviet Union was able to exploit its economic preponderance to promote bilateral integration with each of the CMEA member states, especially in trade relations. The unusually large proportion of foreign trade that the East European countries conducted with the Soviet Union and with other CMEA members rose to nearly 70 percent in the 1960s, except in the case of Romania.² This trend did not bring the supranational integration that Soviet leaders had envisaged, but it did ensure that the East European states remained crucially dependent on (and therefore beholden to) the Soviet Union for key economic goods, particularly energy supplies.

The Soviet Union also fostered greater intra-bloc cohesion in the military sphere, a policy reflected in the newly emerging concept of "coalition warfare." This approach, as described in a classified report by Soviet military planners in the mid-1960s, called for a rapid, massive offensive against the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) by a combination of Soviet and East European forces using both nuclear and conventional weaponry:

The defense strategy of the socialist countries must focus on seizing the most important regions and lines, and on absolutely preventing an incursion by the adversary's forces into the territory of the socialist countries. The strategy will be based on nuclear strikes in conjunction with the use of conventional firepower and mobile operations by combined forces, and also on the wide-scale use of obstruction.³

² J. T. Crawford and John Haberstroh, "Survey of Economic Policy Issues in Eastern Europe: Technology, Trade, and the Consumer," in U.S. Congress, Joint Economic Committee, *Reorientation and Commercial Relations of the Economies of Eastern Europe: A Compendium of Papers*, 93rd Congress, 2nd Session, 1974, 41.

³ "Razvitie voennogo iskusstva v usloviyakh vedeniya raketno-yadernoi voiny po sovremennym predstavleniyam," Report No. 24762s (Top Secret) from Col.-General P. Ivashutin, chief of the Soviet General Staff's Main Intelligence Directorate, to Marshal M. V. Zakharov, head of the General Staff Military Academy, August 28, 1964, in Tsentral'nyi arkhiv Ministerstva oborony, Moscow, D. 158, esp. L. 400. Preparations to carry out this type of strategy could be discerned in Pact exercises even in the late 1970s; see, for example, "Referat des Stellvertreters des Ministers und Chefs der Land-

To underscore the new emphasis on joint military operations, Soviet leaders took several steps to improve the capacity of East European troops to perform effectively alongside Soviet forces. With Moscow's backing, all the East European states significantly modernized and expanded their armies in the 1960s; and they made renewed efforts to promote the interoperability and standardization of Warsaw Pact armaments. From October 1962 on, the Soviet Union conducted joint military exercises with the East European armies.⁴ As a result, the Warsaw Pact, which had been little more than a paper organization for several years after it was founded in 1955, finally started to acquire a few of the trappings of a real alliance.

These efforts to strengthen the Warsaw Pact were initiated by Khrushchev, but they were given even greater emphasis by Brezhnev. Unlike Khrushchev, who had sought to cut Soviet conventional forces and to rely predominantly on long-range nuclear missiles, Brezhnev committed the Soviet Union to a full-scale military buildup that expanded *both* conventional *and* nuclear weapons. The growth and modernization of Soviet conventional forces during the Brezhnev era facilitated major improvements in Soviet combat units in Eastern Europe, whose role was to serve as the "main strategic echelon" of the Warsaw Pact.⁵

The increased vigor of the Pact helped to shore up the Soviet Union's position in Eastern Europe by allowing more of the financial costs of "defending the socialist commonwealth" to be passed off onto the East European governments while avoiding any commensu-

streitkräfte zur Auswertung der Kommandostabsübung JUG-78," April 18, 1978, in Militärisches Zwischenarchiv (MZA), Potsdam, VA-Strausberg/29371, pt. 1. For an early public enunciation of the new concept, see Marshal A. A. Grechko, "Patrioticheskii i internatsional'nyi dolg Vooruzhennykh sil SSSR," *Krasnaya zvezda* (Moscow), October 6, 1961, 3.

⁴ V. V. Semin *et al.*, *Voenno-politicheskoe sotrudnichestvo sotsialisticheskikh stran* (Moscow: Nauka, 1988), 72–74, 185–201, and 231–243. Secret accounts of many of these exercises, prepared by officers in the East German National People's Army, can be found in the Militärisches Zwischenarchiv in Potsdam.

⁵ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, Foreign Assessment Center, *The Development of Soviet Military Power Trends Since 1965 and Prospects for the 1980s*, SR SI 100353 (Top Secret/Intelligence Sources and Methods Involved), April 1981 (declassified March 2001), esp. 1–20.

rate change in the way the alliance operated. All the Soviet-dominated structures of the Warsaw Pact were preserved. Wartime control of allied forces was retained by the Soviet High Command, and even in peacetime the Pact's joint military exercises were infrequently—and then only symbolically—under the command of East European generals. Moreover, all the top posts in the Pact's Joint Command were still reserved exclusively for Soviet officers.⁶

Soviet hegemony in the Warsaw Pact was further strengthened in the early to mid-1960s by a series of top-secret bilateral agreements providing for the deployment of Soviet tactical nuclear warheads and nuclear-capable delivery vehicles on the territory of East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary.⁷ The agreements were described as coming “within the framework of the Warsaw Pact,” but all nuclear warheads were kept under strict Soviet control, and the dual-capable delivery vehicles that the East European countries possessed would have come under direct Soviet command if they had ever been equipped with nuclear warheads during a crisis. Moreover, the thousands of tactical nuclear weapons deployed by Soviet forces on East European territory were not subject to any sort of “dual-key” arrangement analogous to the procedures adopted by NATO in the mid-1960s to give the West European governments an effective veto over the use of American tactical nuclear weapons. Whenever Warsaw Pact exercises included combat techniques for nuclear warfare (as they routinely did from early 1962 on), all decisions on whether to “go nuclear” were reserved exclusively for Soviet political leaders and military command-

⁶ Mark Kramer, “Civil-Military Relations in the Warsaw Pact: The East European Component,” *International Affairs* 61, no. 1 (Winter 1985), 55–56.

⁷ “O przedsięwzięciu mającym na celu podwyższenie gotowości bojowej wojska,” Treaty Text (Top Secret), February 25, 1967, in Centralne Archiwum Wojskowe, Warsaw, F. 6, Kor. 234; “Dogovor mezhdu pravitel'stvami SSSR i ChSSR o merakh povysheniya boegotovnosti raketnykh voisk,” Treaty Text (Top Secret), December 15, 1965, in Vojenský Historický Archiv (VHA), Prague, Fond (F.) Sekretariát Ministra Národní Obrany (MNO), Svazek (Sv.) 16, Archivní jednotka (A.j.) 152; “Hungary: USSR Nuclear Weapons Formerly Stored in Country,” trans. in U.S. Joint Publications Research Service, *Nuclear Proliferation*, JPRS-TND-91-007, May 20, 1991, 14–16; and a series of agreements covering sixteen sites in East Germany, in MZA, VA-Strausberg/29555/Box 155.

ers.⁸ East European leaders were not even consulted. Despite efforts by Romania and one or two other East-bloc governments in the 1960s to establish some form of nuclear “sharing” within the Warsaw Pact, the East European states were never given any say in the use of the alliance’s “joint” nuclear arsenal.⁹

The growth of Soviet strategic nuclear power in the 1960s also helped to strengthen Moscow’s sphere of influence in Eastern Europe. Even at the time of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, when the Soviet Union’s only means of delivering a nuclear attack against the continental United States was a limited number of long-range bombers, U.S. intelligence officials warned President Dwight Eisenhower that any steps aimed at “preparing for military intervention” in Hungary “would materially increase the risk of general war,” including the possibility of a nuclear exchange.¹⁰ With the advent of Sputnik in October 1957 and the USSR’s subsequent deployments of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), as well as the expansion of the Soviet heavy bomber force, the Soviet Union by the early to mid-1960s clearly had the capacity to wreak untold destruction upon the U.S. homeland.¹¹ Although Soviet strategic nuclear forces at the time still lagged well behind those of the United States, the important thing, as was shown by President John F. Kennedy’s overwhelming desire to avoid a nuclear exchange during the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, was that Soviet ICBMs could now inflict “unacceptable damage” on the United States.¹² This

⁸ Bundesministerium für Verteidigung, *Militärische Planungen des Warschauer Paktes in Zentraleuropa*, Bonn, January 1992, 3.

⁹ The nuclear “sharing” debate within the Warsaw Pact is covered in Mark Kramer, “Warsaw Pact Nuclear Operations and the ‘Lessons’ of the Cuban Missile Crisis,” *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, nos. 8–9 (Winter 1996–1997), 334–343.

¹⁰ “Probable Developments in East Europe and Implications for Soviet Policy,” Special National Intelligence Estimate SNIE 12–2–56 (Secret), October 30, 1956, in U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS), 1955–1957/Volume 25 (Eastern Europe), esp. 335.

¹¹ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, “Main Trends in Soviet Military Policy,” National Intelligence Estimate No. 11–4–65 (Secret—Controlled Dissem), April 14, 1965, esp. 5–6 (“Changes in the Strategic Relationship”); reproduced in U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, *Estimates on Soviet Military Power, 1954 to 1984: A Selection*, Washington, DC, December 1994, 191–214.

¹² Raymond L. Garthoff, *Reflections on the Cuban Missile Crisis*, rev. ed. (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1989), 78–95.

new capability reinforced the pattern that emerged as early as June 1953, when the threat of Soviet nuclear or conventional retaliation against Western Europe helped deter NATO from coming to the defense of East German workers who had risen up *en masse* against the Communist regime. The much more dire consequences from any potential nuclear confrontation with the Soviet Union by the mid-1960s led U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk to acknowledge that "our capacity to influence events and trends within the Communist world is very limited. But it is our policy to do what we can..."¹³ Notions of "roll-back" and "liberation" had been fanciful even in the 1950s, but they were all the more irrelevant by the mid- to late 1960s.

In the political sphere, as with the drive for economic integration and closer military relations, the Soviet Union accorded high priority to the goal of increased Soviet-East European cohesion. That goal was strongly endorsed by East European leaders who had come to be key figures in the 1960s, notably Władysław Gomułka of Poland and Walter Ulbricht of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The Soviet Union's firm backing for Ulbricht during the severe crises of the late 1950s and early 1960s, when deepening economic strains and a large-scale exodus of East German citizens to West Berlin and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) had raised doubts about the very existence of the GDR, was crucial in preserving East Germany's front-line role in the Warsaw Pact. In particular, Khrushchev's decision to permit the building of the Berlin Wall in August 1961 halted the mass efflux of refugees from the GDR, staved off further deterioration of the East German economy, and allowed the East German communist party (formally known as the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, or SED) to reassert tight control in the GDR.¹⁴

Soviet relations with Poland and East Germany remained a top priority in Moscow after Brezhnev took office. Brezhnev's chief foreign policy adviser in the 1960s, Andrei Aleksandrov-Agentov, recalled that the Soviet leader "greatly admired and respected" Gomułka

¹³ "Why We Treat Communist Countries Differently: Address by Secretary Rusk," *Department of State Bulletin* 50, no. 1290 (March 16, 1964), 393.

¹⁴ A valuable firsthand Soviet account of this whole episode can be found in the recent memoir by Yulii Kvitsinskii, a long-time Soviet diplomat and foreign ministry expert on Germany, *Vor der Sturm: Erinnerungen eines Diplomaten* (Munich: Siedler Verlag, 1993).

and Ulbricht, and that Brezhnev, in turn, “acquired vast authority among the leaders of the other socialist states.”¹⁵ As both Ulbricht and Gomulka encountered daunting political challenges at home in the latter half of the 1960s, they looked increasingly to Brezhnev for support against their domestic rivals, a trend that gave the USSR even greater influence in Poland and East Germany. (The unequal nature of these relationships became painfully evident when Brezhnev withdrew his backing for Gomulka and Ulbricht at the beginning of the 1970s, and both were quickly ousted.)

The USSR’s hegemonic position in Eastern Europe was further enhanced by a highly publicized conference in Moscow in November 1960, which brought together high-level officials from eighty-one of the world’s communist parties and reaffirmed the “universally recognized vanguard role” of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in the international communist movement.¹⁶ East European party leaders worked closely with Soviet officials at the conference to ensure that the participants would support Moscow’s calls for increased “unity” and “solidarity” with the CPSU in the “stand against imperialism.” Much the same was true of a subsequent all-European conference of communist parties, held in Karlovy Vary in April 1967, a few years after Brezhnev had succeeded Khrushchev. The conference was notable mainly for its continuity in emphasizing the USSR’s pre-eminent role in European communism.

Sources of Friction

Despite these signs of greater Soviet-East European cohesion, most developments during the early Brezhnev years pointed not toward an increase of Soviet control in Eastern Europe, but toward a loosening of

¹⁵ A. M. Aleksandrov-Agentov, *Ot Kollontai do Gorbacheva: Vospominaniya diplomata, sovetnika A. A. Gromyko, pomoshchnika L. I. Brezhneva, Yu. V. Andropova, K. U. Chernenko, i M. S. Gorbacheva* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, 1994), 135–144.

¹⁶ A CPSU plenum was convened in January 1961 to assess the results of the November 1960 conference; the transcript of the plenum and its associated documents were recently declassified. See “Plenum TsK KPSS 10–18 yanvarya 1961 g.,” in Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Noveishei Istorii (RGANI), Moscow, Fond (F.) 2, Opis’ (Op.) 1, Dela (Dd.) 486–536.

that control. In part, this trend reflected the growing heterogeneity of the East European societies, but it also was due to the schism in world communism that had been opened by the Sino-Soviet conflict. A bitter split between the two leading communist powers, stemming from genuine policy and ideological differences as well as from a personal clash between Khrushchev and Mao Zedong, developed behind the scenes in the late 1950s.¹⁷ The dispute intensified in June 1959, when the Soviet Union abruptly terminated its secret nuclear-weapons cooperation agreement with China. Khrushchev's highly publicized visit to the United States in September 1959 further antagonized the Chinese, and a last-ditch meeting between Khrushchev and Mao in Beijing right after Khrushchev's tour of the United States failed to resolve any of the major issues dividing the two sides.¹⁸ From then on, Sino-Soviet relations steadily deteriorated.

By the time Brezhnev took office in October 1964, the Sino-Soviet split had become a central feature of world politics, with important consequences for Soviet–East European relations. All the East European communist leaders had learned of the rift in June 1960, when Soviet and Chinese officials attending the Romanian Communist Party's congress traded polemics and recriminations. Over the next several months, as news of the conflict spread throughout the world, Khrushchev and Mao made a few additional attempts to reconcile their differences; but the split, if anything, grew even wider. The as-

¹⁷ On the sources of the Beijing-Moscow dispute, see Mark Kramer, "Sino-Soviet Relations on the Eve of the Split," *Cold War International History Bulletin*, nos. 6–7 (Winter 1995–1996), 170–185.

¹⁸ For a transcript of these talks, see "Zapis' besedy tovarishcha Khrushcheva N. S. s Predsedatelem TsK KPK Mao Tsze-Dunom, zamestitelyami Predsedatelya TsK KPS Lyu Shao-tsi, Chzhou En'-Laem, Czhu De, Lin' Byao, chlenami Politbyuro TsK KPK Pyn Czhenem, Chen' I i chlenom Sekretariata Van Tszya-syanom 2 oktyabrya 1959 goda," Verbatim Transcript (Special Dossier/Strictly Secret), October 2, 1959, in *Arkhiv Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii* (APRF), Moscow, F. 45, Op. 1, D. 331, Listy (Ll.) 1–33. Equally valuable is the detailed trip report by an influential Soviet Politburo member, Mikhail Suslov, shortly after he and the other members of the delegation returned to Moscow: "O poezdke Sovetskoi partiino-pravitel'stvennoi delegatsii v Kitaiskuyu Narodnuyu Respubliku," Plenum Report (Special Dossier/Eyes Only), December 18, 1959, in RGANI, F. 2, Op. 1, D. 415, Ll. 56–91.

cendence of Brezhnev failed to ameliorate the situation. Initially, a few officials on both sides hoped that the change of leadership in Moscow would permit the two countries to achieve at least a partial rapprochement and to restore a semblance of unity in the international communist movement, but those hopes proved illusory. Enmity between the two sides intensified and moved ever closer toward an armed clash.

The spillover from the Sino-Soviet conflict into Eastern Europe was evident almost immediately, as the Soviet Union and China vied with each other for the backing of foreign communist parties. In late 1960 and early 1961 the Albanian leader, Enver Hoxha, sparked a crisis with the Soviet Union by openly aligning his country with China, a precedent that caused alarm in Moscow.¹⁹ Quite apart from the symbolic implications of Hoxha's move, Soviet leaders had always regarded Albania as an important member of the Warsaw Pact because of "its superb strategic location on the Mediterranean Sea."²⁰ The rift with Yugoslavia in 1948 had eliminated the only other possible outlet for the Soviet navy in the region. To ensure that Albania could serve as a full-fledged "military base on the Mediterranean Sea for all the socialist countries," the Soviet Union had been providing extensive weap-

¹⁹ Valuable documentation on the Soviet-Albanian rift is available in *Albania Challenges Khrushchev Revisionism* (New York: Gamma Publishing, 1976), a compilation put out by the Albanian government that includes full transcripts of meetings between senior Soviet and Albanian officials in 1960, as well as cables and other messages between Hoxha and the Albanian participants in the meetings. A somewhat expanded edition of the collection is available in French: *Le grande divergence 1960* (Paris: Nouveau Bureau d'Édition, 1976). For other crucial Albanian documents pertaining to the split with the USSR, see Ana Lalaj, Christian F. Ostermann, and Ryan Gage, eds., "Albania is Not Cuba': Sino-Albanian Summits and the Sino-Soviet Split," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, no. 16 (Spring 2008), 183–340. Key insights can also be gained by reading the surprisingly compatible accounts in Hoxha's and Khrushchev's memoirs. See N.S. Khrushchev, *Vremya, lyudi, vlast': Vospominaniya N.S. Khrushcheva*, 4 vols. (Moscow: Moskovskie novosti, 1999), vol. 2, 109–121; and Enver Hoxha, *The Artful Albanian: The Memoirs of Enver Hoxha*, ed. by Jon Halliday (London: Chatto and Windus, 1986), 141–247, esp. 224–247. For an early but still useful overview of the crisis, along with a handy collection of public statements and press articles, see William E. Griffith, *Albania and the Sino-Soviet Rift* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1963).

²⁰ Khrushchev, *Vremya, lyudi, vlast'*, vol. 2, 116.

onry, equipment, and training to the Albanian army and navy. In particular, the Albanian navy had received a fleet of twelve modern attack submarines, which initially were under Soviet control but were gradually being transferred to Albanian jurisdiction. Khrushchev believed that the submarines would allow Albania to pose a "serious threat to the operations of the NATO military bloc on the Mediterranean Sea," and thus he was dismayed to find that Soviet efforts to establish a naval bulwark on the Mediterranean might all have been for naught.²¹

As soon as the rift with Albania emerged, the Soviet Union imposed strict economic sanctions, withdrew all Soviet technicians and military advisers, took back eight of the twelve submarines, dismantled Soviet naval facilities at the Albanian port of Vlor, and engaged in bitter polemical exchanges with Albanian leaders. Khrushchev also ordered Soviet warships to conduct maneuvers along the Albanian coast, and he secretly encouraged pro-Moscow rivals of Hoxha in the Albanian Labor Party to carry out a coup.²² The coup attempt was rebuffed, and the other means of coercion proved insufficient to get rid of Hoxha or to bring about a change of policy. In December 1961, Khrushchev severed diplomatic relations with Albania and excluded it from both the Warsaw Pact and CMEA. However, he was not willing to undertake a full-scale invasion to bring Albania back within the Soviet orbit, not least because of logistical problems and the likelihood of confronting stiff armed resistance. The "loss" of Albania, though trivial compared to the earlier split with Yugoslavia and the deepening rift with China, marked the second time since 1945 that the Soviet sphere of influence in East-Central Europe had been breached.

To make matters worse, Soviet leaders soon discovered that China was secretly attempting to induce other East European countries to follow Albania's lead. At a closed plenum of the CPSU Central Committee in December 1963, a high-ranking Soviet official responsible for intra-bloc relations, Yuri Andropov, who became head of the Soviet State Security Committee (KGB) in 1967, noted that the Chinese had been focusing their efforts on Poland, Hungary, and East Germany:

²¹ Ibid., 117.

²² Ibid., 118–119.

The Chinese leaders are carrying out a policy of crude sabotage in relation to Poland, Hungary, and the GDR. Characteristic of this is the fact that in September of this year, during conversations with a Hungarian official in China, Politburo member Chu De declared that China would welcome it if the Hungarian comrades diverged from the CPSU's line. But, Chu De threatened, if you remain on the side of the revisionists, we will have to take a stance against you.²³

China's efforts to lure these three countries (and possibly others) away from Soviet control à la Albania bore little fruit in the end, but Soviet leaders obviously could not be sure of that at the time. The very fact that China was seeking to foment discord within the Soviet bloc was enough to spark consternation in Moscow.

The growing unease in Moscow about the effect of the Sino-Soviet split in Eastern Europe was piqued still further when Romania began to embrace foreign and domestic policies in the 1960s that were at times sharply at odds with the Soviet Union's own policies. Initially, the Romanian quest for autonomy was inspired by the USSR's attempts in 1961 to mandate a supranational economic integration program for CMEA, which would have relegated Romania to being little more than a supplier of agricultural goods and raw materials for the more industrialized communist countries. In response, Romania began shifting much of its foreign trade away from CMEA and toward the West and the Third World. In April 1964, the Romanian government issued a stinging rejection of the Soviet scheme.²⁴ From then on, the reorientation of Romanian foreign trade gathered pace. By the late

²³ "Materialy k protokolu No. 6 zasedaniya Plenuma TsK KPSS: O deyatel'nosti Prezidiuma TsK KPSS po ukrepleniyu edinstva kommunisticheskogo dvizheniya, postanovlenie Sekretariata TsK KPSS ob izdanii tekstov vystuplenii na Plenum TsK Ponomareva B. N., Andropova Yu. V., i Il'icheva L. F., rechi sekretarei TsK KPSS Ponomareva, Andropova, Il'icheva, i Khrushcheva N.S.," Marked-up Transcript (Top Secret), December 9–13, 1963, in RGANI, F. 2, Op. 1, D. 665, L. 30.

²⁴ Romanian Press Agency (Agerpres), *Statement on the Stand of the Romanian Workers' Party Concerning Problems of the World Communist and Working Class Movement* (Bucharest: Agerpres, 1964), 5–50.

1960s, Romania's trade with other CMEA countries as a proportion of its total foreign trade had dropped from 70 to just 45 percent.²⁵

Before long, Romania's defiance extended from economic matters into foreign policy and military activities as well. Romania staked out a conspicuously neutral position in the Sino-Soviet dispute, refusing to endorse Moscow's polemics or to join in other steps aimed at isolating Beijing from the rest of the Communist bloc. In 1967, Romania became the first East European country to establish diplomatic ties with West Germany, a step that infuriated East German leaders. That same year, the Romanians refused to attend the Karlovy Vary conference and maintained full diplomatic relations with Israel after the other Warsaw Pact countries had broken off all ties in the wake of the Six-Day War of June 1967.

More important, Romania adopted an independent military doctrine of "Total People's War for the Defense of the Homeland," as well as a national military command structure entirely separate from that of the Warsaw Pact.²⁶ Several years earlier, in 1958, the Romanian government had requested and obtained the withdrawal of all Soviet troops from Romania, but in the mid-1960s the new Romanian leader, Nicolae Ceaușescu, went much further by prohibiting joint Warsaw Pact maneuvers on Romanian territory and sending only token forces to participate in allied exercises elsewhere. Ceaușescu also stopped sending Romanian army officers to Soviet military academies for training and began openly challenging Soviet domination of the Warsaw Pact's military command structures. When the Soviet-Romanian treaty of friendship and cooperation came up for renewal in 1967–1968, Ceaușescu insisted that provisions be added to ensure that Romanian troops would be used only in Europe and only against "imperialist" countries, not against other communist states. (Ceaușescu was thinking of China when he first proposed these amendments, but the provisions ended up being just as relevant to operations against Czechoslovakia.) Soviet leaders strongly resisted Ceaușescu's demands but

²⁵ Crawford and Haberstroh, "Survey of Economic Policy Issues in Eastern Europe," 41.

²⁶ Alexander Alexiev, *Romania and the Warsaw Pact: The Defense Policy of a Reluctant Ally*, P-6270 (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, January 1979).

ultimately gave in.²⁷ Although Romania had never been a crucial member of the Warsaw Pact, Ceaușescu's growing recalcitrance on military affairs and foreign policy posed serious complications for the cohesion of the alliance.

Developments outside the communist bloc also contributed to the loosening of Soviet control in Eastern Europe. The perceived threat of German aggression, which had long unified the Warsaw Pact governments, had gradually diminished. In the mid-1960s, West Germany had launched its *Ostpolitik* campaign to increase economic and political contacts in Eastern Europe, a campaign whose potentially disruptive impact on the Soviet bloc was well recognized in Moscow.²⁸ As far back as November 1956, senior officials in the CPSU Central Committee apparatus had expressed strong misgivings about the ef-

²⁷ The new treaty was finally concluded in July 1970, more than two-and-a-half years later than planned. See "Dogovor o družbe, sotrudnicestve i vzaimnoi pomoshchi," *Pravda* (Moscow), July 8, 1970, 2.

²⁸ Józef Fiszer and Jerzy Hołcer, eds., *Recepcja Ostpolitik w RFN i w krajach bloku komunistycznego: Polska, ZSRR, NRD, Czechosłowacja, Węgry* (Warsaw: Instytut Studiów Politycznych, 2004). The literature on the genesis and conduct of *Ostpolitik* is immense. Among many useful sources are Carole Fink and Bernd Schaefer, eds., *Ostpolitik, 1969–1974: European and Global Responses* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); M. E. Sarotte, *Dealing with the Devil: East Germany, Détente, and Ostpolitik, 1969–1973* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Julia von Dannenberg, *The Foundations of Ostpolitik: The Making of the Moscow Treaty between West Germany and the USSR* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); N. Piers Ludlow, ed., *European Integration and the Cold War: Ostpolitik–Westpolitik, 1965–1973* (New York: Routledge, 2007); Frank Fischer, *Im deutschen Interesse: Die Ostpolitik der SPD von 1969 bis 1989* (Husum: Matthiesen, 2001); William E. Griffith, *The Ostpolitik of the Federal Republic of Germany* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1978); Thomas F. Banchoff, *The German Problem Transformed: Institutions, Politics, and Foreign Policy, 1945–1995* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), esp. ch. 3; Klaus Hildebrand, *Von Erhard zur Grossen Koalition: 1963–1969* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1984); Arne Hofman, *The Emergence of Détente in Europe: Brandt, Kennedy, and the Formation of Ostpolitik* (London: Routledge, 2007); Wolfgang M. A. Schmidt, *Kalter Krieg, Koexistenz kleine Schritte: Willy Brandt und die Deutschlandpolitik, 1948–1963* (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher, 2001); and Gottfried Niedhart, "Ostpolitik: The Role of the Federal Republic of Germany in the Process of Détente," in Carole Fink, Philipp Gassert, and Detlef Junker, eds., *1968: The World Transformed* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 173–192.

fect that conciliatory overtures from the FRG might have on Poland and Czechoslovakia in the wake of the Hungarian Revolution. They warned that if circumstances went too far, Poland “would no longer be interested in hosting Soviet troops” and that both Czechoslovakia and Poland might “pursue neutrality.”²⁹ That notion seemed far-fetched at the time, no matter how much West German policy might change; but by the mid- to late 1960s, as the FRG’s *Ostpolitik* gathered pace, those earlier warnings seemed all too plausible.

Soviet policy in Eastern Europe also was increasingly constrained by the improvement in U.S.–Soviet relations that occurred after leaders on both sides recognized how close they had come to war during the Cuban missile crisis in October 1962. The new relationship was symbolized by the signing of the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty in August 1963. The incipient superpower détente raised hopes in Moscow that strategic nuclear arms control agreements and increased economic ties would be forthcoming. Such prospects gave the Soviet leadership an incentive to proceed cautiously in Eastern Europe before taking actions that would undermine détente and provoke Western retaliation (though the escalating U.S. military involvement in Vietnam presumably had the opposite effect). The advent of a more cooperative U.S.–Soviet relationship even spawned fears in Europe, both West and East, that the superpowers might eventually seek a formal condominium at the expense of the Europeans. Although this concern was especially acute in East Germany (where Ulbricht constantly worried that the Soviet Union might cut a deal over his head), similar anxieties were present in almost all of the East European countries.

The Prague Spring and the Soviet Response

Amid these conflicting trends in Soviet-East European relations, the events of 1968 unfolded in Czechoslovakia. In early January 1968, Alexander Dubček was chosen to replace the increasingly unpopular

²⁹ “Raschety i plany pravyashchikh krugov po germanskomu voprosu v svyazi s sobytiyami v Pol’she i Vengrii,” Memorandum No. 23055 (Top Secret), from the CPSU Information Committee to the CPSU Presidium, November 29, 1956, in Arkhiv Vneshnei Politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii (AVPRF), F. 595, Op. 77, D. 789, Ll. 437–442.

first secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party (KSČ), Antonín Novotný, who had held the post since 1953. Within weeks of taking office, the new KSČ leader embarked on a broad program of economic reform. Although Dubček remained a loyal communist to the end, the program that he set in motion soon generated pressures for far-reaching political liberalization. The sweeping reforms that ensued during the Prague Spring brought a comprehensive revival of political, economic, and cultural life in Czechoslovakia.³⁰ When press censorship was effectively ended in early 1968, lively discussions of political and social affairs began appearing in Czechoslovak newspapers and journals. Unofficial political “clubs” sprang up all around Czechoslovakia, and numerous commentators advocated the re-establishment of non-Communist political parties from the pre-1948 era. The rehabilitation of victims of the show trials and repressions of the early 1950s, which had begun very tentatively in the early 1960s, was sharply accelerated in the spring of 1968, and lengthy articles appeared condemning the “crimes” of the early communist period. A wide array of other political reforms, which only a year earlier would have been inconceivable, were swiftly implemented as the Prague Spring continued, giving rise to calls for even bolder steps.

³⁰ Of the many works dealing with the events of 1968, see in particular H. Gordon Skilling, *Czechoslovakia's Interrupted Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), which remains an excellent, comprehensive overview. Other books worth consulting about internal events in Czechoslovakia include Galia Golan, *The Czechoslovak Reform Movement: Communism in Crisis, 1962–1968* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1971); Galia Golan, *Reform Rule in Czechoslovakia: The Dubček Era, 1968–1969* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1973); Vladimír Horský, *Prag 1968: Systemveränderung und Systemverteidigung* (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1975); Vladimír V. Kusin, *The Intellectual Origins of the Prague Spring* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1971); Vladimír V. Kusin, *Political Grouping in the Czechoslovak Reform Movement* (London: Macmillan, 1972); Jiří Kosta, “The Czechoslovak Economic Reform of the 1960s,” in Norman Stone and Eduard Strouhal, eds., *Czechoslovakia: Crossroads and Crises, 1918–88* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 231–252; and Eugen Lobl and Leopold Grunwald, *Die intellektuelle Revolution: Hintergründe und Auswirkungen des “Prager Frühlings”* (Dusseldorf: Econ Verlag, 1969). See also the collection of essays by Czech scholars: Václav Kural *et al.*, eds., *Československo roku 1968* (Prague: Ústav mezinárodních vztahů, 1993), vol. 1 (“Obrodný proces”) and vol. 2 (“Počátky normalizace”).

Because Czechoslovakia only recently had seemed to be one of the most orthodox members of the socialist bloc, the measures adopted in 1968 quickly provoked anxiety in Moscow about the potential ramifications. As early as January 18, less than two weeks after Dubček had taken office, the Soviet Politburo discussed events in Czechoslovakia and received a detailed briefing from the Soviet ambassador in Prague, Stepan Chervonenko. The ambassador described Dubček as “unquestionably an honorable and faithful man and a staunch friend of the Soviet Union,” but Chervonenko warned that the KSČ leadership overall was still “weak and divided,” and that Dubček was “vacillating.”³¹ The Soviet Politburo decided to increase bilateral and multilateral contacts with Dubček and to keep a close watch on future developments in Czechoslovakia. In line with this decision, the KSČ leader was invited to Moscow for consultations at the end of January, and a top-level Soviet delegation reciprocated the visit a few weeks later. Moreover, Brezhnev kept in frequent touch with Dubček by telephone and through a series of confidential letters.³²

Initially, Brezhnev and his colleagues expressed their concerns to Dubček in a low-key manner, and Dubček did his best to accommodate those concerns. Although the new leaders of the KSČ moved ahead with wide-ranging political reforms, Dubček tried to preclude internal developments that would be perceived as hostile by his Warsaw Pact neighbors. He continued, albeit often unsuccessfully, to admonish journalists and political commentators not to question the legitimacy of Czechoslovakia’s foreign alliances or the “leading role” of the KSČ, and he sought to dissuade intellectuals and political dissi-

³¹ “Rabochaya zapis’ zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS ot 18 yanvarya 1968 g.,” Verbatim Transcript (Top Secret) January 18, 1968, in APRF, F. 3, Op. 45, D. 99, Ll. 37–39. For similar concerns, see “Zapis’ besed s zam. zav. mezhdunarodnogo otdela TsK KPCh tov. M. Millerom v fevrale 1968 goda,” Cable No. 211 (Top Secret), March 5, 1968, from I. I. Udaltsov, minister-counselor at the Soviet Embassy in Czechoslovakia, to M. A. Suslov, K. V. Rusakov, and A. A. Gromyko, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 299, Ll. 27–33; and “Otdel TsK KPSS,” March 18, 1968, Memorandum (Secret) from V. Moskovskii to M. A. Suslov, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 25, Ll. 12–14.

³² The most important of these letters were declassified and published in Czech in 1991; see “Dokumenty: Dopisy L. Brežněva A. Dubčekovi v roce 1968,” *Historie a vojenství* (Prague), no. 1 (January–February 1991), 141–158.

dents from taking steps that would be tantamount to the formation of a full-fledged political opposition. To this end, Dubček publicly affirmed that the KSČ would not tolerate a revival of “certain non-socialist modes ... under the guise of democracy and rehabilitation,” an obvious reference to the unofficial “clubs” and nascent political parties that had emerged.³³ The KSČ leader hewed to this basic line even as the Prague Spring took on a life of its own and moved gradually beyond the Communist Party’s control.

Dubček’s desire to prevent any impetuous actions was soon complicated by the tortuous sequence of events that led to the removal of his predecessor, Antonín Novotný, from the presidency (a post Novotný had retained after being ousted from the top party job). In late February 1968, General Jan Šejna, the chief of the party committee in the Czechoslovak Ministry of Defense, defected to the United States shortly before he was to be arrested on charges of corruption.³⁴ Rumors spread that Šejna and General Miroslav Mamula, the head of the KSČ CC’s Eighth Department overseeing the armed forces and internal security apparatus, had tried to use the Czechoslovak military in December 1967 and early January 1968 to keep Novotný in power, apparently at Novotný’s request. Although details of the “Šejna affair” remained murky even after an official investigation was completed, what came out was damaging enough to inspire newspapers throughout Czechoslovakia to publish bitter criticism of Novotný and his supporters.

Confronted by these revelations and attacks, hardline officials in key positions came under increasing pressure to resign. In the space of ten days from March 5 to 14, many of the hardliners were indeed forced out and replaced by prominent reform-minded officials. Jiří Hendrych was removed as the KSČ secretary responsible for ideological affairs; Michal Chudík resigned as head of the Slovak National Council; Jan Kudrna was dismissed as interior minister; and Jan Bartuška was removed as procurator general. The ouster of Kudrna and Bartuška on March 14 was particularly significant, because the two of them together had controlled the country’s internal

³³ *K otázkam obrodzovacieho procesu KSČ: Vybrané prejavy prvého tajomníka ÚV KSČ s. Alexandra Dubčeka* (Bratislava: VLP, 1968), 31–58.

³⁴ The official KSČ report on the affair is in “Proč utekl Jan Šejna: Výsledky setření projednány vládou,” *Rudé právo* (Prague), June 12, 1968, 1–2.

security apparatus and had maintained intimate links with the Soviet KGB. The new interior minister, Josef Pavel, not only was a leading proponent of reform, but was also wary of the KGB's intentions in Czechoslovakia—a position that infuriated Moscow. Over the next several months, Soviet leaders repeatedly demanded that Pavel be removed.

The shakeup in Czechoslovakia's internal security network was especially worrisome for Moscow because it came on the heels of major changes in the Czechoslovak People's Army (ČLA), which, like the ČSSR Interior Ministry, had traditionally been a crucial vehicle for Soviet influence in Czechoslovakia, both directly and indirectly. In late February a reform-minded ČLA officer, Army General Václav Prchlík, took over as head of the KSČ Central Committee's State-Administrative Department (the so-called Eighth Department) after Mamula was forced out; and another reform-minded officer of Slovak origin, General Egyd Pepich, was appointed head of the ČLA's Main Political Directorate, the post vacated by Prchlík. Soon thereafter, a number of other senior military officers were dismissed, and in early April the long-time defense minister under Novotný, Army-General Bohumír Lomský, was replaced by a ČLA officer from Slovakia with long-standing ties to Dubček, General Martin Dzúr.³⁵

The turnover of high-ranking personnel in the KSČ, the Czechoslovak Interior Ministry, and the Czechoslovak armed forces sparked ever-greater anxiety in Moscow that traditional channels of Soviet influence in Czechoslovakia were being eroded and undermined by the Prague Spring.³⁶ Although the process of political, economic, and cultural revitalization in Czechoslovakia in 1968 was entirely peaceful throughout, the lack of any violent turmoil did not prevent Soviet leaders from repeatedly drawing analogies to an event they had collectively experienced twelve years earlier—the violent rebellion in Hungary in October–November 1956, which was eventually crushed

³⁵ On Dzúr's earlier ties with Dubček, see Memorandum No. 8468 (Top Secret) from Army-General A. Epishev, chief of the Main Political Directorate of the Soviet Armed Forces, to K. F. Katushev, CPSU Secretary, October 23, 1968, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 311, Ll. 111–112.

³⁶ See Dubček's intriguing comments on this point in *Hope Dies Last: The Autobiography of Alexander Dubček*, trans. and ed. by Jiří Hochman (New York: Kodansha International, 1993), 139, 146.

by a Soviet invasion. As early as March 15, 1968, at a meeting of the CPSU Politburo, the head of the KGB, Yurii Andropov, who had served as Soviet ambassador in Budapest during the 1956 revolution, claimed that events in Czechoslovakia "are very reminiscent of what happened in Hungary."³⁷ Brezhnev, who in 1956 had taken part in all the high-level discussions that led to the Soviet invasion of Hungary, concurred with Andropov's assessment, adding that "our earlier hopes for Dubček have not been borne out." Brezhnev phoned Dubček during a break in the CPSU Politburo's deliberations and emphasized his "grave concern" about the situation in Czechoslovakia, especially the "emergence of patently anti-socialist forces." The Soviet leader warned Dubček that "the Hungarian events of 1956 might soon be repeated in [Czechoslovakia]" unless the KSCĚ moved to re-establish order and crack down on the "anti-socialist elements." Dubček, in trying to allay these concerns, said that he would soon be meeting with the Hungarian communist leader, János Kádár, to discuss the matter. Kádár had coordinated his actions with Brezhnev, who welcomed the Hungarian leader's proposal for a meeting, which he hoped would pave the way for a direct Soviet-Czechoslovak conclave.

As it turned out, however, neither the phone call nor the Kádár-Dubček meeting had as much of an impact as Brezhnev had hoped. Over the next week, events in Prague continued to gather pace, culminating in the downfall of Novotný himself. On March 14, the same day that Kudrna and Bartuška were dismissed from the Interior Ministry, an announcement was made of the suicide of a deputy defense minister, General Vladimír Janko, following reports of his collaboration with Šejna in December and January on behalf of Novotný.³⁸ The outpouring of criticism that ensued in the Czechoslovak press led to further calls for Novotný's resignation and for a complete investigation of his efforts in January to stay in power. The volume of those demands increased after Czechoslovak journalists disclosed that Novotný's

³⁷ "Rabochaya zapis' zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS ot 15 marta 1968 g.," Verbatim Transcript (Top Secret), March 15, 1968, in APRF, F. 3, Op. 45, Delo D. 99, Ll. 123–124.

³⁸ The fullest official investigation of the reasons for Janko's suicide was not declassified until 1994. See "Informace o samovraždě gen. Vl. JANKA," March 14, 1968 (Top Secret), in VHA, F. Sekretariát MNO, Operační správa Generálního štábu (GS/OS) Čs. Armády, 154/277.

son had been a friend of Šejna and that Šejna's rapid advance in the Czechoslovak armed forces had been attributable solely to Novotný's largesse rather than to any professional qualifications or achievements. Under intense pressure, Novotný stepped down from the presidency on March 21 for "reasons of ill health."

If Novotný's forced departure had been an isolated event, it might not have stirred great unease in Moscow; but amid the flurry of other personnel changes in the KSČ in late February and March, as well as a host of changes that followed Novotný's resignation, the ouster of the president seemed to confirm that orthodox communists in Czechoslovakia were in danger of being removed from the scene altogether. On the day that Novotný resigned, the Soviet Politburo met to discuss the latest developments in Czechoslovakia.³⁹ Brezhnev expressed dismay that events were "moving in an anti-communist direction" and that so many "good and sincere friends of the Soviet Union" had been forced to step down. He also noted that the situation in Czechoslovakia was beginning to spark ferment among Soviet "intellectuals and students as well as in certain regions" of the country, notably Ukraine. Brezhnev's misgivings were echoed by other Politburo members, including Prime Minister Aleksei Kosygin, who insisted that the Czechoslovak authorities were "preparing to do what was done in Hungary." The Ukrainian Communist Party leader, Petro Shelest, confirmed that events in Czechoslovakia were having adverse repercussions in Ukraine—repercussions that, in his view, meant the crisis would determine "not only the fate of socialism in one of the socialist countries, but the fate of the whole socialist camp."⁴⁰ Aleksandr Shelepin and Mikhail Solomentsev spoke in similarly ominous tones about the effect of the Prague Spring on Soviet students and intellectuals, warning that "we can no longer

³⁹ "Rabochaya zapis' zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS ot 21 marta 1968 g.," Verbatim Transcript (Top Secret), March 21, 1968, in APRF, F. 3, Op. 45, D. 99, Ll. 147–158.

⁴⁰ For extensive evidence about the impact of the Prague Spring on Ukraine and the way this issue affected Soviet decision-making, see Mark Kramer, "Ukraine and the Soviet-Czechoslovak Crisis of 1968 (Part 1): New Evidence from the Diaries of Petro Shelest," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, no. 10 (March 1998), 234–248; and Mark Kramer, "Ukraine and the Soviet-Czechoslovak Crisis of 1968 (Part 2): New Evidence from the Ukrainian Archives," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, no. 14/15 (Winter–Spring 2003 to Spring 2004), 273–369.

have any confidence about [Dubček's] assurances." They joined Shelest in recommending that the Soviet Union be prepared, if necessary, to resort to "extreme measures," including "military action." Their recommendation was strongly endorsed by Andropov, who argued that "we must adopt concrete military measures" as soon as possible.

Soviet concerns were heightened still further by what happened in the wake of Novotný's removal. The process of selecting a replacement initially took the form of a "nomination campaign" in which the names of several outspoken advocates of reform and liberalization were put forward. Although the eventual successor, Ludvík Svoboda, was a moderate with close ties to Brezhnev dating back to World War II and was chosen in the usual way—first by a KSČ Central Committee plenum and then by the National Assembly in a pro forma vote—the abrupt removal of Novotný and the unorthodox nomination procedures before Svoboda's election seemed to betoken a new way of selecting the highest political elites that would loosen the KSČ's control over the selection process and almost wholly exclude Soviet influence.

Thus, even though the Soviet Union had never been deeply committed to Novotný (as was evidenced by Brezhnev's unwillingness to prevent Novotný's removal in December 1967), the unusual manner of replacing the president aroused concerns among Soviet officials that control of events in Czechoslovakia was slipping away from both the KSČ and Moscow.⁴¹ Brezhnev was particularly upset about Dubček's failure even to consult with Moscow before Novotný was forced to resign. Although it may well be that Brezhnev would have approved the dismissal, it was the procedure rather than the result that provoked the Soviet leader's anger. After all, if Dubček would not consult with his Soviet counterparts about the fate of such a prominent figure as Novotný, that seemed to bode ill for dozens of other pro-Soviet officials in Czechoslovakia who were leery of reform and who were being ousted both from KSČ posts and from the military command and internal security network. Novotný's removal thus appeared, in Soviet eyes, to be a harbinger of a much wider purge that would eventually do

⁴¹ See, for example, the letter from Brezhnev to Dubček, March 16, 1968, in Národní Archiv České Republiky (NAČR), Archiv Ústředního výboru Komunistické strany Československa (Arch. ÚV KSČ), F. 07/15, Zahr. kor. číslo (č.) 787.

away with all traces of Soviet influence in Czechoslovakia. A dangerous rift between Moscow and Prague was steadily emerging.

Reactions within the Warsaw Pact

The growing unease in Moscow about the Prague Spring was reinforced by the much harsher complaints expressed in other East-bloc capitals, especially Warsaw and East Berlin. From the outset, Gomułka, as the first secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR), and Ulbricht, as leader of the SED, were determined to counter "inimical, anti-socialist influences" along their borders. The two men feared that events in Czechoslovakia would prove "contagious" and would induce political instability in their own countries, thereby threatening to undermine their own political control. As early as mid-January 1968, when a high-level Soviet delegation led by Brezhnev paid an unofficial visit to Poland and the GDR, both Gomułka and Ulbricht expressed disquiet to their Soviet counterparts about recent developments in Czechoslovakia.⁴² Gomułka reiterated his concerns in a private conversation with Dubček a few weeks later in the Moravian city of Ostrava, warning that "if things go badly with you [in Czechoslovakia], we in Poland, too, will find hostile elements rising against us."⁴³ In subsequent weeks, Gomułka's and Ulbricht's views of the Czechoslovak reform program took on an increasingly alarmist edge; and before long both of them were calling, with ever greater urgency, for direct intervention by the Warsaw Pact to halt the Prague Spring. Their concerns were shared by the leader of the Bulgarian Communist Party, Todor Zhivkov, who spoke as early as March 6–7 about the desirability of allied military intervention in Czechoslovakia.⁴⁴

⁴² See the materials pertaining to these discussions in Archiwum Akt Nowych (AAN), Warsaw, Archiwum Komitetu Centralnego Polskiej Zjednoczonej Partii Robotniczej (Arch. KC PZPR), Paczka (P.) 32, Tom (T.) 114.

⁴³ "Protokół z rozmowy Pierwszego Sekretarza KC PZPR tow. Władysława Gomułki z Pierszym Sekretarzem KC KPCz tow. Aleksandrem Dubczekem," February 7, 1968 (Secret), in AAN, Arch. KC PZPR, P. 193, T. 24, Dok. 3.

⁴⁴ Iskra Baeva, *Bulgariya i Istochna Evropa* (Sofia: Paradigma, 2001), 133. For a useful assessment of Zhivkov's hostility toward the Prague Spring, see Ivana Skálová, *Podíl Bulharska na Potlačení Pražského Jara 1968* (Prague: Univerzita Karlova v Praze, 2005).

Gomułka's fears that the "anti-socialist" tendencies in Czechoslovakia would spread into Poland were heightened during the first few weeks of March, when students in Warsaw and many other Polish cities held riots and street demonstrations, carrying signs in support of Dubček and proclaiming "*Polska czeka na swego Dubczeka*" (Poland is awaiting its own Dubček).⁴⁵ Although the Polish authorities violently quelled the student protests, the episode convinced Gomułka that events in Czechoslovakia, if allowed to proceed, would have an "increasingly detrimental effect on Poland."⁴⁶ The Polish leader became the first Soviet-bloc official to attack the Czechoslovak reforms publicly when, in a speech before PZPR employees on March 19, he averred that "imperialist reaction and enemies of socialism" were active in Czechoslovakia.⁴⁷ By that point Gomułka's hostility to the Prague Spring had increased still further as a result of the political challenge

⁴⁵ On the effect of the turmoil in Poland, see Jerzy Eisler, *Polski rok 1968* (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2006), esp. 224–395. Eisler's book includes an extensive bibliography along with his lengthy, detailed analysis. See also Jerzy Eisler, *Marzec '68: Geneza—przebieg—konsekwencje* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1993), as well as the comments by one of Gomułka's chief rivals and his eventual successor, Edward Gierek, in Janusz Rolicki, ed., *Edward Gierek: Przerwana dekada* (Warsaw: BGW, 1990), 46–48. The unrest in Poland posed a dilemma for Soviet officials, who initially were unsure what, if anything, they should say about the riots. The director-general of the Soviet TASS news agency, Sergei Lapin, felt the need to contact the CPSU Central Committee Politburo for permission just to publish in *Pravda* and *Izvestiya* a brief dispatch from the official Polish Press Agency. Brezhnev personally approved the request. See Lapin's secret memorandum of March 11, 1968, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 25, L. 3. A notation in Brezhnev's handwriting at the bottom says "*tov. Brezhnev L.I. soglasen*" ("Comrade L.I. Brezhnev agrees").

⁴⁶ "Dopeše sovětského velvyslancě ve Varšave do Moskvy o názorech W. Gomułky na situaci v Československu," from A. Aristov, Soviet ambassador in Warsaw, to the CPSU Secretariat, April 16, 1968 (Top Secret), in Archiv Komise vlády ČSFR pro analýzu události let 1967–1970 (Arch. Komise), Z/S—MID No. 2. See also "Wystąpienie Władysława Gomułki na naradzie Pierwszych Sekretarzy KW PZPR," March 26, 1968, (Top Secret), in AAN, Arch. KC PZPR, P. 298, T. 1, Dok. 3.

⁴⁷ "Umacniamy jedność narodu w budownictwie socjalistycznej Ojczyzny: Przemówienie Władysława Gomułki na spotkaniu z aktywem warszawskim," *Zołnierz Wolności* (Warsaw), March 20, 1968, 3–4. The full speech was republished in *Pravda* (Moscow) on March 22, 1968, 3–4.

he was encountering from a group of ultranationalist “Partisan” officials who supported the hardline Polish Internal Affairs Minister, Mieczysław Moczar. Eventually, Gomułka was able to thwart their efforts and retain his position as PZPR first secretary, but he was greatly weakened in the process.⁴⁸ To help shore up his position, the Polish leader soon resorted to even greater repression at home, including a sustained anti-Semitic campaign; and he became more dependent than ever on the Soviet Union, as he looked to Moscow for political backing against his rivals in the PZPR. Consequently, Gomułka’s aversion to any possible “spillover” from Czechoslovakia intensified.

Ulbricht’s reaction to the events in Czechoslovakia was similar to Gomułka’s in two respects. First, the SED leader was worried about a potential “spillover” of the Prague Spring into East Germany; and second, Ulbricht’s stance vis-à-vis Czechoslovakia was shaped in part by challenges and pressure he was facing at home—in this case from his erstwhile protégé, Erich Honecker.⁴⁹ To guard against any possible “contagion” from the Prague Spring, the East German authorities prohibited the sale of a wide range of Czechoslovak publications in the GDR, ceased issuing exit visas for East German tourists wishing to travel to Czechoslovakia, curtailed bilateral scientific and cultural exchanges, and imposed restrictions on broadcasts from Czechoslovakia. As time went on, the East German government largely sealed off its border with Czechoslovakia. All these measures were similar to the steps implemented in Poland.

⁴⁸ On the way the Moczar affair affected Gomułka’s response to the events in Czechoslovakia, see Eisler, *Polski rok 1968*, 516–632, 711–753. See also Edward Gierek: *Przerwana dekada*, 42–43, 47–50, 60–63, 88–89, and 92–93. Another firsthand account of the Moczar affair, from a very different perspective, is by Franciszek Szlachcic, “Ze wspomnień Ministra Spraw Wewnętrznych,” *Życie literackie* (Warsaw), no. 10, March 6, 1988, 4–5. Szlachcic was a deputy internal affairs minister in 1968 and a close friend of Moczar.

⁴⁹ Lutz Priess, Václav Kural, and Manfred Wilke, *Die SED und der “Prager Frühling” 1968: Politik gegen einen “Sozialismus mit menschlichem Antlitz”* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1996); Heinz Lippmann, *Honecker: Porträt eines Nachfolgers* (Koln: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1971), 204–206; and Gerhard Naumann and Eckhard Trumpler, *Von Ulbricht zu Honecker: 1970—ein Krisenjahr der DDR* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1990).

In one key respect, however, Ulbricht's motives during the crisis differed from those of Gomulka. The prospect of a rapprochement between Czechoslovakia and West Germany was clearly at the forefront of the East German leader's concerns.⁵⁰ After Romania had broken with its East-bloc allies and unilaterally established diplomatic relations with the FRG in early 1967, the rest of the Warsaw Pact states had resolved, at a special meeting in Karlovy Vary, not to do the same until the West German government met a number of stringent conditions. Even so, Ulbricht was worried that some of the Pact leaders might eventually deviate from the Karlovy Vary agreement. He hoped that by opposing the reforms in Czechoslovakia, he could forestall any change in Prague's policy toward Bonn and exploit the events to head off a Soviet decision to seek diplomatic relations with the FRG.⁵¹ Even the slightest hint that Czechoslovakia was considering an opening to West Germany provoked belligerent accusations from Ulbricht.

The Prague Spring and the Soviet Politburo

The concerns expressed by Polish and East German leaders, combined with the disquiet that senior officials in Moscow were beginning to feel, induced the CPSU Politburo to give high priority to the "Czechoslovak question."⁵² From mid-March 1968 on, the issue was constantly at the top of the Politburo's agenda. Brezhnev consulted and worked closely with his colleagues on all aspects of the crisis, ensuring that responsibility for the outcome would be borne collectively. Unlike in December 1967, when Brezhnev had resorted to "personal diplomacy" during his sudden visit to Prague at Novotný's request, the growing "threat" in Czechoslovakia by the spring of 1968 gave him an incentive to share as much of the burden as possible with the rest of the Politburo and

⁵⁰ Among many studies on this theme, one of the best is Wolfgang Schwarz, *Brüderlich entzweit: Die Beziehungen zwischen der DDR und der ČSSR 1961–1968* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 2004). Also still very useful is Adolf Müller and Bedřich Utitz, *Deutschland und die Tschechoslowakei: Zwei Nachbarvölker auf dem Weg zur Verständigung* (Freudenstadt: Campus Forschung, 1972).

⁵¹ See Ulbricht's handwritten notes to this effect in Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv (SAPM0), Zentrales Parteiarhiv der SED (ZPA), Berlin, IV 2/201/778.

⁵² Aleksandrov-Agentov, *Ot Kollontai do Gorbacheva*, 147–149.

Secretariat. In particular, he ensured that his two top colleagues (and potential rivals), Aleksei Kosygin and Nikolai Podgornyi, were prominently involved in all key decisions and negotiations, linking them in an informal troika (with Brezhnev) that represented—and often acted on behalf of—the full Politburo. Much the same was true of Brezhnev's reliance on two other senior Politburo members: Mikhail Suslov, who oversaw ideological matters; and Petro Shelest, whose responsibilities in Ukraine did not prevent him from playing a key role during the crisis.

At the same time, Brezhnev was careful not to get bogged down by lower-level bureaucratic maneuvering. Throughout the crisis the CPSU Politburo, led by Brezhnev, exercised tight control over Soviet policy. The Politburo eventually set up a high-level “commission on the Czechoslovak question,” consisting of Podgornyi, Suslov, Arvids Pel'she, Aleksandr Shelepin, Kirill Mazurov, Konstantin Rusakov, Yuri Andropov, Andrei Gromyko, and Aleksei Epishev. The commission kept a daily watch on events in Czechoslovakia, functioning as an organ of the Politburo that was directly accountable to Brezhnev. (Six of the nine members of the commission, including Podgornyi and Suslov, were full or candidate members of the Politburo, and the three other commission members had been taking an active part in the Politburo's deliberations on Czechoslovakia.)⁵³ The commission's findings and recommendations were regularly brought before the full Politburo for consideration. Brezhnev himself carefully guided the Politburo's proceedings and took direct responsibility for bilateral contacts with Dubček.

Contrary to assertions made by some Western analysts, the CPSU Politburo and Secretariat depended relatively little on lower-level party and state agencies in their dealings with Czechoslovakia. Most of the time, the information flow during the crisis was from the top down (i.e., the Politburo ordered lower-level officials what to think and do), and all media outlets were kept rigidly under the Politburo's control.⁵⁴

⁵³ “Rabochaya zapis' zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS ot 23 maya 1968,” Verbatim Transcript (Top Secret), May 23, 1968, in APRF, F. 3, Op. 45, L. 262.

⁵⁴ Evidence about the top-down flow of information, based on newly declassified materials, is provided in my forthcoming book, *Crisis in Czechoslovakia, 1968: The Prague Spring and the Soviet Invasion*. This new information undercuts much of the utility of the “bureaucratic politics” framework em-

From at least early March on, all significant articles about Czechoslovakia had to be cleared directly with the highest officials, and often with Brezhnev himself.⁵⁵ A formal directive to this effect was issued in early June. Moreover, the Politburo transmitted frequent “informational reports” about the crisis to lower-level party and state organizations, which were required to disseminate the Politburo’s findings to all employees and party members.⁵⁶ Brezhnev and his colleagues used the CPSU Central Committee Organizational-Party Work Department as an oversight mechanism to ensure that dissemination of the reports throughout the Soviet Union (and in the other East-bloc countries) was carried out in strict accordance with the Politburo’s wishes. Preparation of the reports was valuable both in forcing the Politburo to ar-

ployed by Jiří Valenta in *Soviet Intervention in Czechoslovakia, 1968: Anatomy of a Decision*, rev. ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991). Further doubts about Valenta’s approach are raised in Mark Kramer, “The CPSU International Department: Comments and Observations,” in Sergei Grigoriev *et al.*, *The International Department of the CPSU Central Committee* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Strengthening Democratic Institutions Project, 1995), 99–122, esp. 109–111.

⁵⁵ See, for example, the reference in footnote 45 *supra* to a brief official news release about the unrest in Poland, which had to be cleared with Brezhnev.

⁵⁶ See, for example, “Informatsiya TsK KPSS o sobytiyakh v Chekhoslovakii” (Top Secret), March 23, 1968, covered in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 10, Ll. 1–12; “Informatsiya TsK KPSS po vazhneishim voprosam vneshnei politiki i polozheniya v otdel’nykh sotsialisticheskikh stranakh” (Top Secret) and “Informatsiya TsK KPSS o polozhenii v Chekhoslovakii i o nekotorykh vneshnepoliticheskikh shagakh rumynskogo rukovodstva” (Top Secret), June 18, 1968, covered in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 1, Ll. 92–99 and D. 10, Ll. 15–26; “O sobytiyakh v Chekhoslovakii” (Top Secret), July 8, 1968, covered in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 10, Ll. 27–50; “Informatsiya o vstreche v Chierne-nad-Tissoi i soveshchanii v Bratislave” (Top Secret), August 4, 1968, covered in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 24, Ll. 127–135; “TsK KPSS,” Memorandum No. P1513 (Secret), September 30, 1968, from I. Shvets, deputy head of sector in the CPSU Central Committee Department for Party-Organizational Work, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 10, L. 97; “O polozhenii v Chekhoslovakii” (Top Secret), February 7, 1969, covered in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 61, D. 21, Ll. 79–111; and “O sobytiyakh v Chekhoslovakii” (Top Secret), February 12, 1968, covered in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 61, D. 21, Ll. 161–185. See also “TsK KPSS,” Memorandum No. 14194 (Top Secret), May 27, 1968, from V. Stepanov, K. Rusakov, and V. Zagladin, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 19, Ll. 109, 133–136.

rive at a common position and in preventing any divergences at lower levels from the Politburo's line.

New Reforms and New Responses

Despite the growing external pressure, senior Czechoslovak officials continued to advocate far-reaching political liberalization, particularly freedom of the press, on the grounds that uninhibited debate was the only way to ensure that the KSČ would retain its dominant position in Czechoslovak society. In keeping with this notion, Dubček encouraged a lively and wide-ranging exchange of views within the Communist Party about the future course of social, political, and economic liberalization. These discussions culminated in the adoption of a comprehensive "Action Program" at a plenary session of the KSČ Central Committee in early April 1968, a document that became the symbolic blueprint for the final months of the Prague Spring.⁵⁷

The decision to adopt a sweeping reform program was accompanied by the removal or demotion of many prominent anti-reformist officials in the KSČ and the Czechoslovak government (almost all of whom had spent considerable time in the Soviet Union) and the replacement of numerous regional and local party secretaries left over from the Novotný era. The combination of these developments greatly expedited the pace of reform in Czechoslovakia in April and May. Procedures for the rehabilitation of victims of past injustices were drafted and implemented, as were measures that effectively restored freedom of religion and freedom of travel. In accordance with the heterodox notion that the government should be primarily responsible to the National Assembly (i.e., the parliament) rather than to the Communist Party, the powers of the Assembly were enhanced. A new government was organized with Oldřich Černík at its head, and the National Assembly met on its own to begin considering legislation. These reforms were somewhat offset by the KSČ's attempts to prohibit the return of the Social Democratic Party and the formation of any other independent political parties, but the pace of reform still greatly exceeded that of all earlier efforts. The Czechoslovak public responded enthusiastically

⁵⁷ "Akční program Komunistické strany Československa," *Rudé právo* (Prague), April 10, 1968, 1–6.

cally to the KSČ's shift toward liberalization, and popular support for both the party and the Action Program grew rapidly.

Yet, at the same time that the Action Program and personnel changes were generating excitement and anticipation in Czechoslovakia, they were causing even deeper misgivings in Moscow and other Warsaw Pact capitals. Initially, Soviet leaders' response to the Action Program was relatively muted (and excerpts from the Program were even published in the main Soviet daily, *Pravda*, on April 12), but over the next few weeks the Soviet Politburo, as Brezhnev remarked to his colleagues, became "united in the view that [the Action Program] is a harmful program, which is paving the way for the restoration of capitalism in Czechoslovakia."⁵⁸ Of particular concern to Soviet officials were the freewheeling political discussions in the Czechoslovak media and the continued removal of hardline opponents of the Prague Spring, most of whom were replaced by ardent reformers. Earlier, at a hurriedly convened meeting in Dresden on March 23, the leaders of the Warsaw Pact countries other than Romania (which was not invited, for fear that Ceaușescu would disrupt attempts to rein in Czechoslovakia) had rebuked Dubček for allowing "the press, radio, and television to slip away from the party's control" and for dismissing many "loyal and seasoned cadres, who have proven their mettle in years of struggle."⁵⁹ Events over the next several weeks, especially after the pub-

⁵⁸ "Rabochaya zapis' zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS ot 6 maya 1968," Verbatim Transcript (Top Secret), May 6, 1968, in APRF, F. 3, Op. 45, D. 99, L. 202.

⁵⁹ "Protokol der Treffen der Ersten Sekretäre der kommunistischen Parteien Bulgariens, der ČSSR, der DDR, Polens, der Sowjetunion und Ungarns," Verbatim Transcript (Top Secret), March 23, 1968, in SAPMO, ZPA, IV 2/201/778. This transcript was discovered in late 1993 by a German researcher, Lutz Priess. Until then, most experts assumed that no detailed records of the Dresden meeting existed. Brezhnev had explicitly requested at the outset of the conference that no minutes be taken and that the stenographers be ordered to leave the room. His request was duly observed. Hence, the closest thing to a stenographic report in the former Soviet archives and in most of the East European archives was the handwritten notes of the participants. Until 1993, these notes, as well as interviews with and memoirs by participants at Dresden, were the only firsthand source indicating what went on at the Dresden conference. But it turns out that a secret stenographic record—albeit a somewhat incomplete one—was kept by East German officials, thanks to a hidden recording system. The proceedings apparently were

lication of the KSČ Action Program, had greatly reinforced their concerns.

Even though all the changes in Czechoslovakia remained distinctly peaceful, analogies with the violent rebellion in Hungary in 1956 continued to be a salient feature of the Soviet Politburo's deliberations about the Prague Spring. When Dubček and other reform-minded Czechoslovak officials spoke with Soviet leaders, they tried to convince them that the situation was not at all like Hungary twelve years earlier:

[T]he current events [in Czechoslovakia] are not a repetition of the events of 1956 in Hungary. In Hungary the popular masses rose up against the party and Central Committee, whereas in Czechoslovakia the masses are speaking out only against the conservatives and the group around [the hardliner Antonín] Novotný and are supporting the [KSČ], the Central Committee, and friendship with the Soviet Union.⁶⁰

But these assurances, in the absence of concrete steps demanded by the Soviet Union, failed to mollify leaders in Moscow. Although Soviet officials acknowledged that no violent upheavals were occurring in Czechoslovakia ("at least not yet"), they argued that this was purely because "the American and West German imperialists" had "shifted tactics" and were "resorting to a new, step-by-step approach." The extensive evidence now available in Western and former East-bloc archives makes clear that, contrary to these allegations of "imperialist" involvement, Western governments were in fact not masterminding or even doing much to help the Prague Spring. The reform program in Czechoslovakia was devised from within.

For Soviet leaders, however, the allegations served a clear purpose. By repeatedly accusing the U.S. and West German governments

taped without the knowledge of the other participants, including the Soviet delegates. The recordings were subsequently transcribed for Ulbricht and other SED leaders.

⁶⁰ Cited in "TsK KPSS," Memorandum No. 1/22 (Top Secret) from P. Shelest to the CPSU Politburo, March 21, 1968, in Tsentral'nyi Derzhavnyi Arkhiv Hromads'kykh Ob'ednan' Ukrainy (TsDAHOU), Kyiv, F. 1, Op. 25, Sprava (Spr.) 27, Ll. 18–23. See also Emil Šip, "Prvomájové referendum," *Rudé právo* (Prague), May 3, 1968, 2.

of conspiring with “reactionary” forces in Czechoslovakia, they sought to discredit the Prague Spring and associate it with the “malevolent designs of imperialism.” They argued that Western governments had been chastened by the experience in 1956 (when Soviet troops forcefully quelled the Hungarian Revolution) and were therefore now adopting a subtler approach. At a closed party gathering in late April 1968, the Soviet Politburo member Petro Shelest explained this alleged shift in Western tactics:

In Hungary in 1956 the imperialists urged the local reactionaries to embark on an armed attack to seize power, whereas in Czechoslovakia they are trying to establish a bourgeois order by “peaceful means.” That is, they are trying gradually to change the situation so that the reactionaries can gradually seize one position after another... [The anti-Soviet elements in Czechoslovakia] do not dare to speak out openly in support of anti-Communist and anti-Soviet demands. They understand [from the decisive Soviet response in 1956] that this game is over once and for all. The enemies provide cover for themselves with demagogic statements about “friendship” with the Soviet Union, while at the same time sowing doubts about some sort of “inequality” and about the pursuit of a special, “independent” foreign policy. They are also trying to undercut the leading role of the [Communist] party.⁶¹

Shelest claimed that he was still hoping that “the healthy forces in the KSČ will be able to regain control of the situation and guide the country back onto the socialist path.” But he added that “in the event of danger,” the CPSU Politburo “will use all of our capabilities,” including military forces, “to thwart the intrigues of our enemies who want to rip fraternal Czechoslovakia out of the commonwealth of socialist countries.”⁶²

Shelest’s argument signaled a far-reaching change of course that was later reflected in the Brezhnev Doctrine. The implication of his

⁶¹ “Doklad P. E. Shelesta ‘Ob itogakh aprel’skogo plenuma TsK KPSS,’” Speech Text (Top Secret), April 25, 1968, in TsDAHOU, F. 1, Op. 25, Spr. 97, Ll. 8–9.

⁶² Ibid., L. 11.

comments was that even if violence did not ever break out in Czechoslovakia, the peaceful “seizure of power” by “hostile forces” (supposedly “in collusion with Western imperialists”) could eventually pose the same sort of “mortal danger” that arose in Hungary in 1956, necessitating the same type of Soviet response. This line of reasoning was later publicly codified in an article in the main CPSU newspaper, *Pravda*, in July 1968, a few days before Soviet leaders met in Warsaw with the leaders of East Germany, Poland, Bulgaria, and Hungary to decide what to do about Czechoslovakia. The article, titled “Attack against the Foundations of Socialism in Czechoslovakia,” asserted that “the tactics of those who would like to undermine the foundations of socialism in Czechoslovakia are even more cunning and insidious” than the “frenzied attacks launched by counter-revolutionary elements in Hungary in 1956.”⁶³ Because the “champions of counter-revolution” in Czechoslovakia and their Western backers were aware that open revolt would provoke a Soviet military response, they were “carrying out a stealthy counter-revolution” that would peacefully “subvert the gains of socialism.”

Soviet leaders stressed this theme at a bilateral Soviet-Czechoslovak meeting in Moscow in early May, where they repeated all their earlier complaints and raised a host of new allegations, leaving the Czechoslovak delegation almost speechless.⁶⁴ Dubček, Černík, and Smrkovský were interrogated at length by their Soviet counterparts about the Action Program, the personnel changes, and other recent developments. Brezhnev and his colleagues not only presented a litany of complaints about the incipient “counter-revolution” in Czechoslovakia, but also expressed dismay that the Czechoslovak army was “being weakened” and that Czechoslovakia’s “inexcusably lax” border security was facilitating “imperialist espionage and subversive activities” against the Warsaw Pact. The Soviet officials at the meeting repeatedly chastised Dubček for underestimating the strength of “anti-socialist and counter-revolutionary forces” in Czechoslovakia who were seeking to “restore a bourgeois order” and “abandon the socialist common-

⁶³ I. Aleksandrov, “Ataka protiv sotsialisticheskikh ustoev Chekhoslovakii,” *Pravda* (Moscow), July 11, 1968, 4.

⁶⁴ “Zapis’ peregovorov s delegatsiei ChSSR, 4 maya 1968 goda,” Stenographic Transcript (Top Secret), May 4, 1968, in APRF, F. 3, Op. 91, D. 100, Ll. 1–148. All quoted passages are from this transcript.

wealth.” Brezhnev insisted that developments in Czechoslovakia had gone so far that they were “no longer just an internal matter,” and he closed the session with a thinly veiled warning that if the KSČ authorities did not soon “rectify things on [their] own,” the USSR itself would have to take much stronger action.

The growing impatience in Moscow was just as evident two days later, when the Soviet Politburo convened to discuss how events in Czechoslovakia might develop in the wake of the bilateral meeting.⁶⁵ Brezhnev claimed that the Czechoslovak media were “endangering socialist gains and the role of the Communist Party in Czechoslovakia,” and he accused Dubček of having “decapitated the party” by forcing so many “honest and committed Communists” to retire. All participants in the session expressed their determination to “preserve socialism in Czechoslovakia” by any means necessary. They approved a number of steps designed to bring greater pressure to bear on KSČ leaders and the Czechoslovak public. The Soviet Politburo also designated Petro Shelest to serve as a clandestine liaison with the hardline forces in the KSČ led by Vasil Bil’ak, Alois Indra, and Drahomir Kolder. Brezhnev acknowledged that the buildup of military and political pressure on Czechoslovakia would “evoke protests in the bourgeois and Czechoslovak media,” but he added: “Well, so what? This will not be the first time such a thing has happened... And besides, after this is done, everyone will know that it’s not worth fooling around with us.”⁶⁶

As the rift with Czechoslovakia widened in the spring of 1968, the CPSU Politburo authorized the Soviet defense minister, Marshal Andrei Grechko, to begin preparing Soviet forces in Eastern Europe for a large-scale military contingency in the region.⁶⁷ This marked the initial step in planning for Operation Danube (the eventual code-name of the invasion of Czechoslovakia). Further “concrete plans about our practical measures” for Czechoslovakia were considered on May 6 by the Soviet Defense Council, a political-military body headed by Brezhnev. The Defense Council’s recommendations, including the dis-

⁶⁵ “Rabochaya zapis’ zasedanii Politbyuro TsK KPSS ot 6 maya 1968,” LL. 200–220.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, L. 218.

⁶⁷ Directive No. MO/GOU/1/87567 (Top Secret—Eyes Only), April 5, 1968, to Colonel-General K.I. Provalov, in Magyar Honvédség Központi Irattára (MHKI), Budapest, 5/12/16.

patch of a high-level Soviet military delegation to Czechoslovakia in mid-May and the use of large-scale military exercises on Czechoslovak territory in late May and June to exert political pressure and carry out logistical preparations for future military action, were then considered and approved by the CPSU Poliburo.⁶⁸ Brezhnev and his colleagues also took a number of important political steps to ensure that members of the CPSU Central Committee and other lower-ranking party officials would be ready for a vigorous stance against Czechoslovakia.⁶⁹ These steps were useful both in reaffirming the general thrust of Soviet policy and in giving Central Committee members a sense of involvement in high-level policymaking.

Within the Soviet Politburo itself, however, a firm consensus about the best course to pursue had not yet emerged. For the time being, Brezhnev was unwilling to embrace a clear-cut position, and he permitted and indeed encouraged other members of the Politburo to express their own opinions about particular matters.⁷⁰ The diary of one of the senior Politburo members at the time, Petro Shelest, reveals that as late as the summer of 1968 the differing approaches of Brezhnev, Kosygin, Podgornyi, Suslov, and others "kept the Politburo from being firmly united about how to deal with the question of Czechoslovakia."⁷¹ The formerly secret transcripts of the Politburo's sessions in 1968 amply corroborate Shelest's observation. The transcripts indicate that some members of the Politburo, such as Andropov, Podgornyi, and Shelest, were vehemently supportive of military intervention from an early stage, whereas others, particularly Suslov, were far more circumspect. The transcripts also show that a substantial number, including Kosygin, Aleksandr Shelepin, and Pyotr Demichev, fluctuated markedly during the crisis, at times favoring "extreme measures" (i.e., military action) and at other times seeking a political solution.

⁶⁸ "Rabochaya zapis' zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS ot 6 maya 1968," LI. 208, 216–219.

⁶⁹ For an extended discussion of these steps, see Kramer, *Crisis in Czechoslovakia*, 1968.

⁷⁰ Aleksandrov-Agentov, *Ot Kollontai do Gorbacheva*, 147–149. See also the declassified diaries of Petro Shelest, "Dnevnik P. E. Shelesta," in Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Sotsial'no-Politicheskoi Istorii (RGASPI), F. 666, Tetrad' (Te.) 6, LI. 6–7.

⁷¹ "Dnevnik P. E. Shelesta," in RGASPI, F. 666, Te. 6, L. 7.

Nevertheless, even when the members of the Soviet Politburo disagreed with one another, their disagreements were mainly over tactics rather than strategic considerations or fundamental goals. All the members of the Politburo agreed that the reform process in Czechoslovakia was endangering the “gains of socialism” and the “common interests of world socialism,” and they feared that the ongoing changes in Czechoslovakia would set an alarming precedent for the entire communist bloc. Analogies with the Hungarian revolution, no matter how dubious, persisted in high-level discussions. By the late spring of 1968, most of the Soviet Politburo members sensed that drastic action would be necessary to curtail the Prague Spring. Although some still hoped that Czechoslovak leaders themselves would be willing to crack down, many had begun to suspect that it was no longer possible to count on a purely “internal” solution.

The time constraints that Soviet leaders believed they were facing increased precipitously in June and July, as it became evident that reformist delegates were going to dominate the KSČ’s Fourteenth Congress in September. From Moscow’s perspective, this trend posed the danger that orthodox, pro-Moscow officials (i.e., “healthy forces”) who were still in place would be removed *en masse* by the Congress, setting Czechoslovakia on a “non-socialist” course. To forestall that prospect, Soviet leaders sharply stepped up their pressure on Dubček, urging him to move expeditiously in combating “anti-socialist” and “counter-revolutionary” elements. In particular, they urged the KSČ First Secretary to reimpose tight restraints on the press, to disband the unofficial “clubs” that had sprouted up, and to remove the outspoken reformers who had increasingly moved into influential positions in key party and state organizations. These demands, however, left Dubček in an unenviable position. Freedom of the press was the bedrock of the Prague Spring, symbolizing all the recent changes in Czechoslovakia. A crack-down would signal at least a temporary end to liberalization and would be politically disastrous.⁷² Furthermore, the greater the pressure the Soviet Union exerted on Dubček, the more he believed that his best defense was to show that widespread popular support existed for both the KSČ and the reform program. Maintaining a free press, in his view, was the only viable way to achieve this objective, but it also created a

⁷² On this point, see Dubček, *Hope Dies Last*, 161–163.

problem: The freedom necessary to assure press support for the regime was frequently used by journalists and public commentators to attack the Soviet Union and other Warsaw Pact member states.

Hence, Dubček's leeway for maneuver became more and more attenuated. Throughout the spring and summer of 1968 he sought to persuade the press to halt its criticism of the Soviet Union and the party's leading role in Czechoslovak life, but his efforts met with little success.⁷³ The task of restraining the media was made all the more difficult by the growing number and severity of public attacks from the other Warsaw Pact countries, which spurred the Czechoslovak press to respond in kind and exacerbated the already tense atmosphere. Angered by the attempts of Soviet, East German, and Polish leaders to intimidate the reformers in Prague, many Czechoslovak journalists and intellectuals called for bold measures to guarantee the permanence of the latest reforms. These demands heightened the concerns in Moscow and other East-bloc capitals and led to further obloquy in the Soviet, East German, and Polish media against the Prague Spring, which in turn caused the Czechoslovak media to become even bolder in their commentary.⁷⁴ The situation was an uncomfortable one for Dubček, to say the least. But there were few steps he could take to rectify the situation short of reimposing censorship, which he was unwilling to do.

Soviet Concerns about Czechoslovakia's Foreign Alignment

In part because Dubček was unable to mollify Soviet displeasure over the press and other internal changes, he strove to reassure Moscow about the firmness of Czechoslovakia's commitment to the Warsaw Pact and the "socialist commonwealth."⁷⁵ Looking back to the events of 1956 in Hungary, Dubček and other senior KSČ officials concluded

⁷³ "Soudruh Alexander Dubček: Hodnocení současné situace, zpráva o činnosti orgánů ÚV, další taktický postup strany, příprava sjezdu KSČ," *Rudé právo* (Prague), June 2, 1968, 2.

⁷⁴ See, for example, "Po návštěvě delegace ČSSR v Moskvě," Dispatch by ČTK correspondent Jan Risko, May 12, 1968, in NAČR, Arch. ÚV KSČ, F. 07/15, A.j. 22.

⁷⁵ See the comments of the Czechoslovak foreign minister in 1968, Jiří Hájek, in *Dix ans après: Prague 1968–1978* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1978), 110–115, 163–164, 172–179.

that by upholding Czechoslovakia's membership in the Warsaw Pact and maintaining broad control over the reform process, they could carry out sweeping domestic changes without provoking Soviet military intervention.⁷⁶ This conclusion, as we now know, was erroneous even about the earlier case of Hungary. The Soviet Presidium's decision at the end of October 1956 to quell the revolution in Hungary through a full-scale invasion on November 4 predated Hungary's announced intention to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact.⁷⁷ Whether valid or not, however, the "lesson" that Czechoslovak officials drew from the 1956 crisis—that internal reform would be tolerated so long as membership in the Warsaw Pact was not questioned—induced them to make frequent references to Czechoslovakia's "unbreakable friendship and alliance" with the USSR.⁷⁸ As domestic liberalization gathered pace, Dubček was particularly careful to issue repeated expressions of solidarity with Moscow and to pledge that Soviet interests in Czechoslovakia would be safeguarded under all circumstances. He also emphasized that Czechoslovakia would uphold all its "external" obligations to the Warsaw Pact, including its role as a leading military supplier to key Third World countries such as North Vietnam.⁷⁹

Although Dubček was undoubtedly sincere in his professions of loyalty to the Soviet Union, his assurances failed to defuse the crisis. The rapid sequence of events since January 1968 had stirred doubts in Moscow about the integrity of Czechoslovakia's long-term commit-

⁷⁶ See Dubček's comments on this matter in *Hope Dies Last*, 178–179.

⁷⁷ Mark Kramer, "The Soviet Union and the 1956 Crises in Hungary and Poland: Reassessments and New Findings," *Journal of Contemporary History* 33, no. 2 (April 1998), 163–214.

⁷⁸ See, for example, "Projev soudruha Alexandra Dubčeka," *Rudé právo* (Prague), April 25, 1968, 1–2.

⁷⁹ "Zapis' besedy s ministrom inostrannykh del NR Bolgarii tov. I. Bashevym," July 11, 1968 (Secret), from A. M. Puzanov, Soviet ambassador in Bulgaria, to the CPSU Secretariat, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 278, Ll. 78–82. Because of the Johnson administration's preoccupation with the Vietnam War, Czechoslovakia's continued role as a supplier of military equipment to North Vietnam inhibited U.S. support for the Prague Spring. See, for example, "Notes on Emergency Meeting of the National Security Council," August 20, 1968 (Secret), in National Security Council Box No. 3, Tom Johnson's Notes of Meetings, August 20, 1968, Lyndon Baines Johnson National Library.

ment to the Warsaw Pact. Soviet leaders were alarmed by the “hostile” and “anti-Soviet” forces in Prague, and they suspected that the leaders of the KSČ would be increasingly amenable to calls, from both within and outside the party, for policies favoring national over “internationalist” interests. Before long, some in Moscow came to fear that a major shift in Czechoslovak foreign policy—perhaps even a shift toward neutrality (à la Yugoslavia) or alignment with the West—could no longer be ruled out. In early May 1968 Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko, who was a member of the CPSU Politburo commission on the Czechoslovak crisis, warned the Politburo that “in the best scenario,” the “burgeoning counter-revolution” in Czechoslovakia would soon “mean a second Romania, and this will be enough for the complete collapse of the Warsaw Pact.”⁸⁰ Even those in Moscow who did not believe that a radical change would take place immediately were concerned that the Prague Spring would induce a steady reorientation of Czechoslovakia’s loyalties in Europe, especially if pro-reform elements in the KSČ gained ever-greater sway.

Soviet perceptions of this matter were not entirely fanciful. Although Dubček himself never contemplated any far-reaching innovations in foreign policy, the press and non-communist organizations in Czechoslovakia by mid-1968 had begun alluding to the need for “independence” from Moscow and the pursuit of Czechoslovakia’s “own national interests.”⁸¹ That theme was also being propounded by a growing number of researchers at the KSČ’s specialized institutes on international affairs, as well as by a few more senior party and Foreign Ministry officials. At the KSČ Central Committee plenum in late May, Drahomir Kolder found it necessary to excoriate those who “allege that [Czechoslovakia’s] orientation toward the Soviet Union has degraded our international position and forced us to uphold and defend interests alien to us.”⁸² In retrospect, it may seem extremely unlikely that Czechoslovakia would have attempted a full-scale shift away

⁸⁰ “Rabochaya zapis’ zasedaniya Polityuro TsK KPSS ot 6 maya 1968 g.,” L. 211.

⁸¹ Skilling, *Czechoslovakia’s Interrupted Revolution*, 617–658. See also Galia Golan, *Reform Rule in Czechoslovakia: The Dubček Era, 1968–1969* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 200–211.

⁸² “Z diskuse na plenu ÚV KSČ ve dnech 29. května—1. června 1968,” *Rudé právo* (Prague), June 7, 1968, 3.

from the Warsaw Pact in 1968, but Soviet leaders at the time could not afford to dismiss any scenario that, if realized, would prove ominous for the Warsaw Pact. The Prague Spring had already brought so many dramatic changes in Czechoslovakia's internal politics that there was no telling what might eventually become of the country's "socialist internationalist" stance on foreign policy.

The seeming plausibility and urgency of these concerns were magnified by signs of turmoil within the Czechoslovak People's Army. The ouster of many hardline communist (and pro-Soviet) military officers and National Defense Ministry personnel in the spring of 1968 allowed the reform movement to extend far into the ČLA. A lively debate arose in Czechoslovakia, both publicly and privately, about the possibility of sharply reducing military spending and transferring resources to the civilian economy. Implicit in any such move would be a diminution of the country's military obligations to the Warsaw Pact. Further controversy about Czechoslovakia's role in the Warsaw Pact arose in early June, when thirty officers from the Klement Gottwald Military-Political Academy, including the rector, Colonel Vojtěch Mencl, sent Dubček a "Memorandum" which, though not advocating withdrawal from the Pact, strongly criticized existing alliance structures and proposed numerous reforms both in the alliance and in Czechoslovak policy.⁸³ The implementation of these measures would have resulted in a markedly different Soviet-East European military relationship. When the Gottwald Memorandum was published in early July in the military newspaper *Lidová armáda*, it received overwhelming support within the Czechoslovak armed forces. Nearly all of the document's main proposals were included in drafts prepared by the National Defense Ministry for consideration at the KSČ's upcoming Fourteenth Congress.

Combined with the ongoing personnel changes and the debates over military spending, the Gottwald Memorandum sparked fresh apprehension in Moscow about the future of Czechoslovakia's contribution to the Warsaw Pact. Detailed reports from the Soviet defense ministry and the KGB, which were sent regularly to the CPSU leadership, offered a gloomy view of the "military-political standing and

⁸³ "Memorandum: Formulovat a konstituovat Československé státní zájmy v oblasti vojevenství," June 4, 1968, in *Ústav pro soudobé dějiny, Sběrka Komise vlády ČSFR pro analýzu událostí let 1967–1970 (ÚSD-SK), D II/73.*

combat readiness of the Czechoslovak armed forces.”⁸⁴ In a briefing to the Politburo on May 23, Marshal Grechko claimed that the Czechoslovak army was “rapidly deteriorating” and was “no longer capable of defending the border with the FRG.”⁸⁵ A few weeks later, Soviet military officials warned Brezhnev that if the number of “ČLA officers who favor ‘democratic reforms in the army’” continued to grow, it would accelerate the “grave decline in the Czechoslovak army’s combat capability.”⁸⁶ Brezhnev, in turn, urged the leaders of the KSČ to realize that “when your army is being weakened, this is not and cannot be a purely internal matter. We count on your [army’s] strength, just as you rely on the might of the Soviet Union.”⁸⁷

Far from abating, however, Soviet concerns intensified in mid-July when the views expressed in the Gottwald Memorandum were openly endorsed and substantially amplified at a press conference by General Václav Prchlík, the head of the powerful State-Administrative Department of the KSČ Central Committee.⁸⁸ Prchlík chided the Soviet Union and other Warsaw Pact countries for having “arbitrarily stationed their units on [Czechoslovak] territory” (a reference to joint military exercises that had been extended without Czechoslovakia’s consent after the scheduled completion date in June), and he called for the “formulation of a Czechoslovak military doctrine” that would be distinct from Warsaw Pact doctrine. Prchlík also averred that “qualitative changes” were needed in the alliance to bring about “genuine equality among the individual members.” Under existing arrangements, he argued, the Pact’s military organs were dominated “by marshals, generals, and lower-ranking officers of the Soviet Army,” while representatives of the East European armed forces “hold no responsibilities at all nor have a hand in making decisions.”

⁸⁴ See, for example, the voluminous reports and memoranda in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, Dd. 232, 243, and 309.

⁸⁵ “Rabochaya zapis’ zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS ot 23 maya 1968 g.,” May 23, 1968 (Top Secret), in APRF, F. 3, Op. 45, D. 99, Ll. 260–262.

⁸⁶ Comments recorded in entry for June 14, 1968, “Dnevnik P. E. Shelesta,” in RGASPI, F. 666, Te. 3, L. 24.

⁸⁷ “Zapis’ peregovorov s delegatsiei ChSSR 4 maya 1968 goda,” L. 144.

⁸⁸ “Vystoupení generála V. Prchlika na tiskové konferenci,” *Obrana lidu* (Prague), July 16, 1968, 1–2. For a typical Soviet response, see “Komu ugozhaet general V. Prkhlik,” *Krasnaya zvezda* (Moscow), July 23, 1968, 2.

Prchlik's assessment of the need for major reforms in the Warsaw Pact was largely in accord with what many East European officials had been saying in private for some time, and most of his recommendations had already been proposed by Romanian leaders. Indeed, proposals along these lines had been discussed at a meeting of the Warsaw Pact's Political Consultative Committee in early March 1968, and some version of them was slated to be approved later in the year.⁸⁹ Even so, Prchlik's willingness to raise the issue in such a blunt manner at a time of heightened tension between Moscow and Prague was extraordinary. The news conference deeply antagonized Soviet leaders and army officers, who charged that Prchlik had "distorted the essence" of the Warsaw Pact, "defamed the Soviet military command," and "improperly divulged vital secrets about the deployment of the Joint Armed Forces."⁹⁰ Soviet responses to the news conference were particularly strident because of longstanding concerns about Prchlik. Since early May, reports had been filtering into Moscow that Prchlik was intent on drafting contingency plans to resist a Soviet invasion. His proposals had been rejected immediately both by Dubček and by Defense Minister Martin Džúr, and no such preparations had actually been carried out; but the disclosures made by Prchlik—as the KSČ official directly responsible for military and security—had generated alarm in Moscow. Soviet leaders assumed that as time went on, there was a greater likelihood that Czechoslovak army commanders would prepare an active resistance against outside intervention.⁹¹ Coupled with the changes

⁸⁹ "Stenografische Niederschrift der Beratung des Politischen Beratenden Ausschusses der Teilnehmerstaaten des Warschauer Vertrages in Sofia im März 1968," Stenographic Transcript (Top Secret), March 6–7, 1968, in Politisches Archiv des Auswärtiges Amt, MfAA, G-A 553, Blatt. 1–43, 88–100.

⁹⁰ "Pervomu sekretaryu KPCh, t. Aleksandru Dubcheku" (Top Secret) from Marshal I. Yakubovskii, commander-in-chief of the Warsaw Pact, July 18, 1968; in NAČR, Arch. ÚV KSČ, F. 07/15.

⁹¹ "Interview with Jiří Pelikán: The Struggle for Socialism in Czechoslovakia," *New Left Review*, no. 71 (January–February 1972), 27. Pelikán was a member of the KSČ Central Committee, head of the state television service, and chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee of the National Assembly as of August 1968. On Prchlik's role, see also John Erickson, "International and Strategic Implications of the Czechoslovak Reform Movement," in Vladimir V. Kusin, ed., *The Czechoslovak Reform Movement, 1968* (Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio Press, 1973), 26.

that had already taken place in the Czechoslovak military establishment, such a prospect aroused deep anxiety in Moscow about the impact of the Prague Spring on Czechoslovakia's military alignment and, more broadly, on the Warsaw Pact. Memories of the heavy losses that the Soviet Army experienced when confronted by armed resistance in Hungary in October–November 1956 were still vivid for many of the Soviet officers who were preparing the 1968 invasion.⁹²

Soviet leaders demanded that Prchlík be removed from his post in the KSČ Central Committee apparatus, but their demands were only partly fulfilled. The State-Administrative Department that Prchlík had directed, which had been a notorious organ of repression under Novotný, was simply abolished on July 25, as had been promised all along in the KSČ's Action Program. Prchlík was then reassigned to other military duties (as commander of one of Czechoslovakia's military districts) rather than being fired ignominiously. Soviet leaders were dismayed to learn that the general would still be in an influential position. Indeed, in his new capacity, Prchlík was even able to continue working on an expanded version of a draft report on the "external and internal security of the Czechoslovak state," which had been prepared under his auspices in late June.⁹³ The report was to serve as the basis for the military and national security policies adopted by the KSČ Congress in September. The draft was never published, but a copy was leaked by "confidential sources" to the Soviet embassy in Prague and

⁹² See, for example, the memoir by one of the top Soviet officers involved in the invasion, Lieutenant-General S. M. Zolotov, "Shli na pomoshch' druž'yam," *Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal*, no. 4 (April 1994), 15–24.

⁹³ The secret Czech document, titled "Otázky politiky vnitřní a vnější bezpečnosti státu, současný stav a základní směry jejího řešení" (Questions of Policies for the Internal and External Security of the State, Their Current Status, and the Basic Ways of Resolving Them), was sent by Prchlík to Dubček on June 24, 1968. The marked-up copy is stored in NAČR, F. 07/15, Svazek (Sv.) 18, A.j. 176, Ll. 36–65. The copy that was leaked to the Soviet Embassy and subsequently sent to the CPSU Politburo can be found in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 310, Ll. 121–153, along with a cover memorandum (marked "Top Secret") from the Soviet ambassador in Czechoslovakia, Stepan Chervonenko, to Defense Minister Andrei Grechko, Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, and the two most senior CPSU officials who were handling the crisis on a day-to-day basis, Konstantin Katushev and Konstantin Rusakov. Chervonenko noted that the author of the draft was the "infamous General Prchlík."

was then promptly transmitted to high-ranking officials in Moscow, who could see for themselves that the positions espoused by Prchlik during his news conference were in line with those being put forth for adoption by the KSČ. Indeed, the draft report went even further than Prchlik did at his news conference in calling for sweeping changes in Czechoslovakia's approach to defense and national security. The report claimed that the country's military policy was still based on "erroneous and obsolete ideological-political premises of the Stalinist era," and it insisted that Czechoslovakia must formulate "its own national military doctrine" and seek "an equal role in the common decisions of the alliance," rather than "just passively accepting those decisions." The report also urged Czechoslovak leaders to reject "unrealistic and dangerous scenarios," especially scenarios involving nuclear warfare, which had always dominated the Warsaw Pact's military planning.

This last point brought to the fore the most sensitive military issue of all during the 1968 crisis, namely, the role of Soviet nuclear weapons in Czechoslovakia. No Soviet troops had been permanently stationed on Czechoslovak territory after 1945, but materials declassified in the early 1990s reveal that the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia secretly concluded two bilateral agreements in the early 1960s entitling the Soviet Army to deploy nuclear-armed weapons on Czechoslovak territory during an emergency.⁹⁴ In 1965 the two countries signed a more far-reaching agreement authorizing the Soviet Union to store nuclear warheads permanently at three sites in western Czechoslovakia under strict Soviet control.⁹⁵ No hint of these plans was ever disclosed in public. Construction of the sites and deployment of the warheads were due to be completed by the end of 1967, but last-minute delays meant that the facilities had not yet entered service when the Prague Spring began. It is clear, therefore, that Soviet anxiety in 1968 about the security of Czechoslovakia's borders and about the spread of reformist influences within the Czechoslovak army was tied, in no small

⁹⁴ "Dohoda ČSSR-ZSSR o vzájemných dodávkách výzbroje a voj. techniky v rr. 1963–1965," March 1963 (Top Secret), in VHA, F. Sekretariát MNO, A.j. 26, 2.

⁹⁵ "Dogovor mezdu pravitel'stvami SSSR i ChSSR o merakh povysheniya boegotovnosti raketnykh voisk" (cited in note 7 *supra*). See also Petr Luňák, *Plánování nemyslitelného: Československé válečné plány 1950–1990* (Prague: Dokořán, 2007), 112–118.

part, to concerns about the construction and planned operation of Soviet nuclear weapons sites in Czechoslovakia.⁹⁶ Those concerns were exacerbated still further when Soviet officials came across the report drafted by Prchlík and his colleagues, who insisted that any war in Europe involving nuclear weapons would be “purely senseless” and would “bring about the total physical destruction of the ČSSR.” The document stressed that Czechoslovak military policy must be aimed first and foremost at ensuring the “continued existence and sovereignty” of the country. This line of argument implied that a military doctrine appropriate for Czechoslovakia would have to be based on the eschewal of nuclear weapons and nuclear warfare. Not only would such a doctrine have been incompatible with basic tenets of the Warsaw Pact’s own military doctrine and war plans at the time; it also would have cast doubt on the status of the proposed sites in Czechoslovakia for Soviet nuclear warheads.

Soviet Concerns about a “Spillover”

Even if no questions had emerged about Czechoslovakia’s *foreign* orientation, Soviet leaders believed that the country’s *internal* changes were themselves a grave threat to the cohesion of the communist bloc. If the Prague Spring, with its tolerance of dissent, elimination of censorship, democratization of the Communist Party, and wide-ranging economic reforms, were to “infect” other Warsaw Pact countries, including the Soviet Union, it might well precipitate the collapse of the socialist camp. The threat of a spillover into Poland and East Germany had been of concern for some time, particularly after the outbreaks of unrest in Warsaw in early March. Gomułka repeatedly warned Soviet leaders that “reactionary centers operated and inspired by foreign intelligence services” were seeking to extend their “subversive activities” beyond Czechoslovakia.⁹⁷ His complaints took on a more urgent

⁹⁶ On this point, see Mark Kramer, “The Prague Spring and the Soviet Invasion: New Interpretations,” *Cold War International History Bulletin*, no. 3 (Fall 1993), esp. 9–12.

⁹⁷ “Zapis wystapien na spotkaniu pierwszych sekretarzy KC: Bulgarii, NRD, Węgier, Polski i ZSRR w Moskwie, 8 maja 1968 r.” Stenographic Transcript (Top Secret), May 8, 1968, in AAN, Arch. KC PZPR, P. 193, T. 24, D. 4.

tone after Czechoslovak students held large rallies in May to condemn political repression and anti-Semitism in Poland.⁹⁸ Brezhnev followed up on the Polish leader's complaints by admonishing Dubček to prevent Czechoslovak citizens from "interfering in [Poland's] internal affairs."⁹⁹ Like Gomułka, Ulbricht wanted to forestall any "contagion" from Czechoslovakia by swiftly and decisively bringing an end to the Prague Spring. Following a multilateral conference in Moscow on May 8, he stayed "on vacation" in the Soviet Union for nearly three weeks as an official guest of the CPSU Central Committee.¹⁰⁰ During that time he had ample opportunity to convey further warnings to the Soviet authorities about the latest events in Czechoslovakia. (Ulbricht also did his best to derail the tentative progress in Soviet-West German relations.) The repeated East German and Polish denunciations of the Prague Spring could not help but take their toll.

Even more worrisome from Moscow's standpoint was the prospect of a spillover into the Soviet Union itself. Soviet leaders had been on edge about this matter because of the resurgence of Soviet dissident groups and intellectuals in 1966–1967 and early 1968. The authorities responded with vigorous repression and show trials, but events in Czechoslovakia seemed to give new impetus to the Soviet dissident movement. Leading proponents of democratic change such as Andrei Sakharov publicly hailed the Prague Spring and called on the Soviet leadership to halt its pressure against Czechoslovakia.¹⁰¹ The elimination of censorship in Czechoslovakia enabled dissident Soviet writers to get their work published in Czechoslovak periodicals, in much the same way that Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn had sent a letter to the Czechoslovak Writers' Congress in June 1967 denouncing official censor-

⁹⁸ "Zapis' besedy v TsK KPSS s rukovoditelyami bratskikh partii Bolgarii, Vengrii, Germanii, Pol'shi," May 8, 1968 (Top Secret), in NAČR, Arch. Komise, Z/S 3, Ll. 151–171; and "Depeše sovětského velvyšlance ve Varšave předsedovi Rady ministrů SSSR A. N. Kosyginovi," Memorandum (Top Secret) from A. Aristov, Soviet ambassador in Warsaw, to Soviet Prime Minister Aleksei Kosygin, May 22, 1968, in ÚSD-SK, Z/S—MID No. 5, Ll. 179–180. See also Eisler, *Polski rok 1968*, 732–733.

⁹⁹ "Zapis' peregovorov s delegatsiei ChSSR 4 maya 1968 goda," L. 136.

¹⁰⁰ "Tovarishch Val'ter Ul'brikht na otdykhe v SSSR," *Krasnaya zvezda* (Moscow), May 11, 1968, 1.

¹⁰¹ Andrei Sakharov, *Vospominaniya* (New York: Izdatel'stvo Chekhova, 1990), 371–389.

ship in the Soviet Union.¹⁰² By the same token, activists involved in the underground press (*samizdat*) in the USSR began translating and disseminating a wide range of materials from Czechoslovakia. Soviet leaders tried to suppress these activities by adopting further harsh measures and banning the circulation of some Czech periodicals, but they sensed that a crackdown would be futile so long as publications and broadcasts from Czechoslovakia continued to enter the Soviet Union. Brezhnev emphasized this point to the KSČ leadership during bilateral talks in early May: "Your newspapers are read also by Soviet citizens and your radio broadcasts attract listeners in our country as well, which means that all this propaganda affects us just as much as it does you."¹⁰³

Soviet concerns about a spillover from Czechoslovakia intensified as reports streamed into Moscow about disaffection among Soviet youth and growing ferment in several of the union republics, notably Ukraine, Moldavia, Georgia, and the Baltic states. Brezhnev and his colleagues learned from KGB sources that a surprising number of Soviet college students were sympathetic to the Prague Spring, including "some [who] are contemplating the possibility of replicating the Czechoslovak experience in our own country."¹⁰⁴ With the fiftieth anniversary of the Soviet Komsomol (Communist Youth League) due to be celebrated in 1968, Soviet officials were dismayed to find that a growing number of young people were being enticed by "false slogans about the 'liberalization' of socialism, which are being promoted by counter-revolutionaries."¹⁰⁵ The "false slogan" in question

¹⁰² *IV. Sjezd Svazu Československých spisovatelů (Protokol): Praha, 27.-29. června 1967* (Prague: SCSS, 1968), 131–162.

¹⁰³ "Zapis' peregovorov s delegatsiei ChSSR 4 maya 1968 goda," L. 138.

¹⁰⁴ "Studenchestva i sobytiya v Chexoslovakii," report transmitted by KGB Chairman Yu. V. Andropov to the CPSU Secretariat (Top Secret), November 5, 1968, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 48, Ll. 120–153. See also the comments by Brezhnev, Aleksandr Shelepin, and Mikhail Solomentsev in "Rabochaya zapis' zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS ot 21 marta 1968 goda," Ll. 147–158.

¹⁰⁵ "Zamechaniya k dokumentu 'Pod rukovodstvom Kommunisticheskoi partii po leninskomu puti: K 50-letiyu Vsesoyuznogo Leninskogo Kommunisticheskogo Soyuzu Molodezhi 1918–1968 g.g.," Directive (Top Secret) from the CPSU Politburo to the CPSU Central Committee Propaganda Department, September 1968, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 23, Ll. 77–79.

was, of course, the notion of “socialism with a human face” that had gained sway in Czechoslovakia in 1968 and had sparked consternation in Moscow. The spate of revelations about the effects of the Prague Spring on Soviet youth spurred the Soviet Politburo to order the CPSU Propaganda Department to adopt special measures that would prevent “right-wing opportunism from overtaking the youth movement, as happened earlier in both Czechoslovakia and Poland.”¹⁰⁶

Equally disconcerting from Moscow’s perspective were the growing signs that events in Czechoslovakia had emboldened Ukrainian intellectuals and nationalist elements. Newly declassified materials, including Soviet Politburo transcripts and the diaries of the Ukrainian leader Petro Shelest, not only confirm Grey Hodnett and Peter Potichnyj’s earlier conclusion that “there was an important linkage between the situation in the Ukraine and the developments in Czechoslovakia,” but also demonstrate that Soviet leaders themselves clearly believed the two situations were linked.¹⁰⁷ On numerous occasions, Shelest complained to Brezhnev that events in Czechoslovakia were “causing unsavory phenomena here in Ukraine as well.”¹⁰⁸ The situation, he noted, was especially bad in Ukraine’s “western provinces, where the inhabitants receive information directly from their neighbors across the border” and “watch both Czechoslovak and Western radio and television.” Shelest reported that vigorous steps had to be taken to curb the “distribution of political and nationalist leaflets” and to prevent the circulation within Ukraine of newspapers published by the Ukrainian community in Czechoslovakia. During bilateral negotiations with KSČ leaders in late July, Shelest accused them of approving “the

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., L. 79.

¹⁰⁷ See, for example, “TsK KPSS,” Memorandum No. 15782, 1/51 (Secret), June 11, 1968, from P. Shelest, First Secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party, to the CPSU Secretariat, in RGANI, Op. 60, D. 1, Ll. 86–90. See also “Zapis’ peregovorov s delegatsiei ChSSR 4 maya 1968 goda,” Ll. 141. The quoted passage is from Grey Hodnett and Peter J. Potichnyj, *The Ukraine and the Czechoslovak Crisis*, Occasional Paper No. 6 (Canberra: Australian National University’s Research School of Social Sciences, 1970), 2.

¹⁰⁸ See entries for April 12, April 24, May 15, June 11, and June 22, 1968, in “Dnevnik P. E. Shelesta,” in RGASPI, F. 666, Te. 4, Ll. 303, 309, 319, 354, 376, 378. Quotations in the remainder of this paragraph are from Shelest’s diaries.

publication of counter-revolutionary tracts which are then sent through special channels into Ukraine.”¹⁰⁹ Because Shelest was a full Politburo member and the leader of a key republic bordering on Czechoslovakia, his views during the crisis were bound to have a major effect on Soviet decision-making.

The reports from Ukraine seemed even more worrisome after the Soviet Politburo learned that “support for the KSČ’s course toward so-called liberalization” was also evident in Moldavia, Georgia, and the Baltic states.¹¹⁰ Brezhnev and his colleagues were especially dismayed that periodicals, newspapers, letters, and other materials casting a positive light on the Prague Spring were “pouring in” from Czechoslovakia and Romania. At the Politburo’s behest, party officials in the outlying Soviet republics undertook “comprehensive measures aimed at further increasing political work among the population.”¹¹¹ Five Politburo members —Andrei Kirilenko, Aleksandr Shelepin, Arvīds Pelše, Pyotr Demichev, and Yuri Andropov —were designated to oversee these measures and to recommend other ways of “eliminating pernicious ideological and bourgeois nationalist phenomena.”¹¹² Although the burgeoning unrest in the USSR’s western republics would probably not have eluded the authorities’ control, the threat of a spillover from Czechoslovakia into the Soviet Union was fast becoming a reality by mid-1968.

All these concerns—political, ideological, and military—gradually fused into a widely shared perception in Moscow that events in Czechoslovakia were spinning out of control. The sense of impending danger, or of “spontaneity” and “unlimited decentralization,” as Soviet Politburo member Viktor Grishin put it in a speech in April 1968, eventually colored Soviet views of the whole Prague Spring. It was

¹⁰⁹ See also “Záznam jednání předsednictva ÚV KSČ a ÚV KSSS v Čierna n. T., 29.7–1.8.1968,” Stenographic Transcript (Top Secret), August 1, 1968, in NACR, Arch. ÚV KSČ, F. 07/15, Sv. 12, A.j. 274, Ll. 311, 313.

¹¹⁰ See, for example, “TsK KPSS: Informatsiya,” Cable No. 22132 (Secret), August 1, 1968, from Yurii Mel’kov, Second Secretary of the Moldavian Communist Party, to the CPSU Secretariat, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 2, L. 30; and “TsK KPSS,” Cable No. 13995 (Top Secret), May 23, 1968, from V. Mzhavanadze, First Secretary of the Georgian Communist Party, to the CPSU Secretariat, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 22, Ll. 5–9.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² “Rabochaya zapis’ zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS ot 3 marta 1968 g.,” Ll. 93–95.

this cumulative impact of events, rather than any single development, that seems to have convinced Brezhnev and his colleagues that internal changes in Czechoslovakia were threatening vital Soviet interests. The necessity of countering that threat was no longer in doubt by mid-1968; the only question remaining for Soviet leaders was whether—and when—an external military solution would be required.

Soviet–Warsaw Pact Coercive Diplomacy

By July and early August, the Soviet Union was applying relentless pressure on the Czechoslovak authorities to reverse the liberalization program. The Soviet campaign was supported throughout by Poland, East Germany, Bulgaria, and anti-reformist members of the KSČ Presidium. Brezhnev used a variety of bilateral channels to urge Czechoslovak officials to combat “anti-socialist” and “counter-revolutionary” elements; and he even approached a few of Dubček’s reformist colleagues surreptitiously in the hope of finding a suitable replacement who would be willing to implement a crackdown.¹¹³ In addition, a series of conclaves of Warsaw Pact leaders—in Dresden in March, Moscow in May, Warsaw in mid-July, and Bratislava in early August—generated increasingly harsh criticism and threats of joint action to “defend the gains of socialism” in Czechoslovakia.¹¹⁴ An additional

¹¹³ See the interview with Josef Smrkovský in “Nedokončený rozhovor: Mluví Josef Smrkovský,” *Listy: Časopis československé socialistické opozice* (Rome) 4, no. 2 (March 1975), 17; and the interview with Oldřich Černík in “Bumerang ‘Pražskoi vesnoi,’” *Izvestiya* (Moscow), August 21, 1990, 5. Both Smrkovský and Černík were members of the KSČ Presidium in 1968. Smrkovský was also president of the National Assembly and a leading architect of the Prague Spring; Černík was the Czechoslovak prime minister. Shelest records an incident in his diary (“Dnevnik P. E. Shelesta,” in RGASPI, F. 666, Te. 4, L. 80) that suggests the overtures may have found a receptive audience in Smrkovský, but no further corroboration of this incident has emerged.

¹¹⁴ Transcripts of the first three meetings are now available from the East German, Czechoslovak/Polish, and Polish archives, respectively. See “Protokol der Treffen der Ersten Sekretäre der kommunistischen Parteien Bulgariens, der ČSSR, der DDR, Polens, der Sowjetunion und Ungarns”; “Stenografický záznam schůzky ‘pětky’ k Československé situaci 8. května 1968,” May 8, 1968, in Archiv ÚV KSČ, F. 07/15; and “Protokół ze spotkania przywódców partii i rządów krajów socjalistycznych—Bulgarii, NRD, Pol-

meeting was held secretly in Moscow on August 18, two days before the invasion. Brezhnev seemed to prefer the leverage that these multilateral conferences afforded him, particularly because East German and Polish leaders had staked out such vehement positions against the Prague Spring from the outset.

Dubček was present at the Dresden conference, but he was not invited to (or even notified of) the Moscow conference in May, and he chose not to attend the meeting in Warsaw. The Warsaw meeting, on July 14–15, proved to be a turning point in many respects. It marked the first time that Hungarian officials, including János Kádár, joined with their East German, Polish, and Bulgarian counterparts in expressing profound doubts about the ability of the Czechoslovak authorities to regain control of events. Kádár even pledged, in a conversation with Brezhnev, that “if a military occupation of Czechoslovakia becomes necessary, [Hungary] will take part without reservation.”¹¹⁵ The Warsaw meeting also marked the first time that Soviet officials who had earlier adopted a “wait-and-see” attitude began roundly condemning the Prague Spring and calling for “extreme measures.” Far more than at previous gatherings of Warsaw Pact leaders in 1968, the option of military intervention loomed prominently throughout the deliberations in Warsaw.

The tone for the Warsaw meeting was set at a preliminary Soviet-Polish discussion on the eve of the formal talks.¹¹⁶ Gomulka argued that

ski, Węgier i ZSRR—w Warszawie, 14–15 lipca 1968 r.,” Copy No. 5 (Top Secret), July 14–15, 1968, in AAN, Arch. KC PZPR, P. 193, T. 24, Dok. 4. Many other newly released documents and firsthand accounts shed further light on these meetings; see in particular the lengthy interview with János Kádár in “Yanosh Kádár o ‘prazhskoi vesne’,” *Kommunist* (Moscow), No. 7 (May 1990), 96–103, which covers all three meetings, especially those in Dresden and Warsaw.

¹¹⁵ “Rabochaya zapis’ zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS ot 3 iyulya 1968 g.,” Verbatim Transcript (Top Secret), July 3, 1968, in APRF, F. 3, Op. 45, L. 367.

¹¹⁶ This preliminary meeting was not included in the Polish transcript of the talks, but it was recorded in detail in Shelest’s diary. See “Dnevniki P. E. Shelests,” in RGASPI, F. 666, Te. 5, Ll. 30–31. Later on, when Brezhnev informed the CPSU Central Committee about the proceedings of the Warsaw meeting, he chose not to mention the preliminary talks. See his lengthy speech in “Plenum TsK KPSS 17 iyulya 1968 g.,” July 17, 1968 (Top Secret), in RGANI, F. 2, Op. 3, D. 323, Ll. 2–38.

Brezhnev was being “deceived” and “hoodwinked” by Dubček, and he urged the Soviet leader to be “guided by principles, resoluteness, and honor,” rather than by “emotions.” Gomulka expressed concern that “up to now [the Soviet Union] has not raised the question of sending troops to Czechoslovakia.” He insisted that a military solution had become unavoidable because of Moscow’s earlier cunctations. Anything less than an invasion, Gomulka warned, would be an “empty gesture.”

At the formal five-power meeting the next day, Gomulka was more restrained, but he argued in his lengthy opening speech that the KSČ was “abandoning Marxism-Leninism,” and that developments in Czechoslovakia were “endangering the whole socialist commonwealth.”¹¹⁷ Moreover, during a break in the talks, which was not recorded in the formal Polish transcript, Gomulka again charged that Soviet leaders were being “hoodwinked” by Dubček, and he repeated his demand that “troops be sent to Czechoslovakia.”¹¹⁸ Ulbricht and the Bulgarian leader, Todor Zhivkov, joined Gomulka in his hardline stance. Zhivkov, in particular, openly called for joint military intervention to “restore the dictatorship of the proletariat” in Czechoslovakia:

There is only one appropriate way out—through resolute assistance to Czechoslovakia from our parties and the states of the Warsaw Pact. At present, we cannot rely on internal forces in Czechoslovakia... Only by relying on the armed forces of the Warsaw Pact can we change the situation.¹¹⁹

This appeal, for the time being, was not endorsed by the Soviet delegates, but Brezhnev’s keynote speech confirmed that non-military options were indeed nearly gone and that preparations for armed in-

¹¹⁷ “Protokół ze spotkania przywódców partii i rządów krajów socjalistycznych,” Ll. 4, 7.

¹¹⁸ This break was recorded in “Dnevnik P. E. Shelesta,” in RGASPI, F. 666, Te. 4, Ll. 40–41.

¹¹⁹ “Protokół ze spotkania przywódców partii i rządów krajów socjalistycznych,” L. 29. Shelest notes that in informal conversations with Zhivkov right before and after the Bulgarian leader’s speech, Zhivkov had urged Brezhnev to be “more decisive,” adding that “the sooner troops are sent, the better.” See “Dnevnik P. E. Shelesta,” in RGASPI, F. 666, Te. 4, Ll. 38–39.

tervention would have to move ahead. Although the Soviet leader still wanted to pursue a political solution, he emphasized that the "Five" would have to look to the KSČ's "healthy forces" rather than to Dubček.¹²⁰ Brezhnev had not yet given up all hope of working with Dubček, but he clearly sensed that the KSČ leader would be unwilling to comply with key Soviet demands, especially about personnel changes and the press.

At Brezhnev's suggestion, the participants in the meeting agreed to send Dubček a joint letter denouncing the Prague Spring and calling for urgent remedial steps. A draft letter that the Soviet delegation brought to the meeting was submitted to a joint editing committee to be put into final form. The Warsaw Letter, as it quickly became known, was little more than an ultimatum, specifying a long series of measures that were "necessary to block the path of counter-revolution."¹²¹ The letter offered an ultimatum to the KSČ leaders. Using hostile and belligerent rhetoric, the letter accused the Czechoslovak authorities of repeatedly succumbing to "anti-socialist and counter-revolutionary forces" and of forsaking the KSČ's "leading role" by tolerating press criticism and countenancing the formation of non-communist groups. The letter also alleged that Czechoslovakia's role in the socialist commonwealth was being undermined by "hostile, anti-Soviet elements" who were seeking to distance Czechoslovakia from the GDR and USSR in order to curry favor with West German "revanchists."

Further on, in what was to become a central part of the "Brezhnev Doctrine," the signatories of the Warsaw Letter contended that "a situation has arisen in which the threat to the foundations of socialism in Czechoslovakia jeopardizes the common vital interests of the other socialist countries." The only way to prevent "the loss of socialist gains" and to thwart the counter-revolution, according to the letter, was for the KSČ to restore "democratic centralism" within its ranks, ban all unofficial political organizations, reimpose stringent press censorship, and carry out "a resolute and bold offensive against rightist and anti-socialist forces" who were seeking to "tear Czechoslovakia out of the

¹²⁰ "Protokół ze spotkania przywódców partii i rządów krajów socjalistycznych," *Ll.* 30–42.

¹²¹ "Tsentral'nomu Komitetu Kommunisticheskoi Partii Chekhslovakii," *Pravda* (Moscow), July 18, 1968, 1.

socialist camp.” The document concluded on an ominous note, promising the “solidarity and comprehensive assistance of the fraternal socialist countries” as the KSČ undertook “necessary steps to block the path of reaction.” By proclaiming both a right and a duty for the Soviet Union and its allies to offer such assistance, and by describing the situation in Czechoslovakia as “completely unacceptable for a socialist country,” the Warsaw Letter was more explicit than previous joint statements had been in raising the prospect of armed intervention.

The Warsaw Letter provoked official and public consternation in Czechoslovakia, but Dubček and his supporters did not yet realize how dire the situation had become. They were unaware, for example, that on July 19, four days after the Warsaw meeting, the CPSU Politburo began considering “extreme measures” to turn the political situation around in Czechoslovakia. At this session and a follow-up meeting on July 22, the Politburo adopted a dual-track policy of 1) proceeding with all the steps needed to send troops into Czechoslovakia, while 2) making one final attempt at negotiations.¹²² These two tracks were reaffirmed at an expanded meeting of the Politburo on July 26–27, with a few key military officers present. On the one hand, the members of the Politburo unanimously “approved the [military] plans laid out by [Defense Minister] A.A. Grechko” and “authorized comrade Grechko to take measures to carry out those plans in an expeditious manner.”¹²³ On the other hand, they devised a negotiating strategy for bilateral talks that were due to begin on July 29 in the small border town of Čierna nad Tisou. Those talks were seen as the only remaining opportunity to resolve the crisis through peaceful means.

To ensure that the first track (i.e., the military option) could be implemented successfully, the Politburo sought greater assurance that the “healthy forces” (i.e., pro-Soviet hardliners) in Czechoslovakia would be able to establish a viable regime. Earlier on, many Soviet of-

¹²² “Rabochaya zapis’ zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS ot 19 iyulya 1968 g.,” Verbatim Transcript (Top Secret), 19 July 1968, and “Rabochaya zapis’ zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS ot 22 iyulya 1968 g.,” Verbatim Transcript (Top Secret), July 22, 1968, in APRF, F. 3, Op. 45, D. 99, Ll. 417–426 and 427–434, respectively.

¹²³ “Rabochaya zapis’ zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS ot 26/27 iyulya 1968 g.,” Verbatim Transcript (Top Secret), July 27, 1968, in APRF, F. 3, Op. 45, D. 99, Ll. 437–438.

ficials had expressed deep skepticism about the prospects of relying on the “healthy forces” to assume power in the wake of an invasion.¹²⁴ A consensus emerged at the Politburo’s July 19 meeting that the Soviet Union had to obtain a formal document from the “healthy forces” that would credibly commit them to act once Soviet troops moved in. To this end, Brezhnev phoned Shelest on July 20 and instructed him to leave immediately for a clandestine meeting with Vasil Bil’ak, one of the leaders of the KSČ’s anti-reformist group.¹²⁵ With assistance from Kádár and other Hungarian officials, Shelest traveled to a remote island on Hungary’s Lake Balaton and met with Bil’ak late that night. He explained to Bil’ak the importance of receiving a formal “letter of invitation” from the KSČ hardliners, which would provide a “guarantee of a bolder and more organized struggle against the rightists.” Bil’ak promised that he would transmit such a letter to Shelest in the near future. Having secured that pledge, Shelest flew to Moscow and met with Brezhnev on the evening of July 21 to inform him of the auspicious results. The next day, Shelest briefed the full Politburo.

With hopes buoyed by Shelest’s secret liaison with Bil’ak, Soviet leaders traveled on 28 July to Čierna nad Tisou to meet with the leaders of the KSČ. They were ready, if necessary, to break off the talks after the first day and return to Moscow for an emergency meeting on July 30 with Polish, East German, Bulgarian, and Hungarian officials.¹²⁶ But when the preliminary sessions ended on the 29th, the Soviet participants decided it was worth staying to try to forge some sort of agreement. Although the talks produced mainly acrimony and recriminations, a fragile compromise emerged on the third and fourth days. The two sides did not sign a formal document at the end of the talks, but they did reach (or at least thought they had reached) an in-

¹²⁴ See, for example, the comments of Podgornyi, Demichev, and Kosygin in “Rabochaya zapis’ zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS ot 16 maya 1968 g.,” Verbatim Transcript (Top Secret), May 16, 1968, in APRF, F. 3, Op. 45, D. 99, Ll. 237–241.

¹²⁵ This entire episode was unknown until Shelest’s diaries became available in 1996. See “Dnevnik P. E. Shelesta,” in RGASPI, F. 666, Te. 5, Ll. 45–52.

¹²⁶ “Pamyatka dlya konfidentsial’nykh besed,” July 1968 (Top Secret), memorandum for the CPSU Politburo, in APRF, F. 3, Op. 91, D. 99, Ll. 12–13. See also the intriguing passages in Shelest’s memoirs, “Dnevnik P. E. Shelesta,” in RGASPI, F. 666, Te. 5, Ll. 67–69, which make clear that Shelest and Andropov were hoping that the talks would break down.

formal agreement that imposed ill-defined obligations on the Czechoslovak leaders and called for a follow-up meeting in Bratislava among all the Warsaw Pact countries other than Romania. Some press reports claimed that the Čierna talks had produced a full-fledged “breakthrough,” but subsequent events made clear just how ephemeral this breakthrough was. As Brezhnev boarded the train on August 1 to return to Moscow, he bade farewell to the KSČ delegation with the following words:

You gave us a promise, and we are confident you will fight to carry it out. For our part, we want to affirm that we are prepared to give you unlimited help in this effort. . . . If our plan is thwarted, it will be very difficult to convene another meeting. I say this with full responsibility. We will then have to come to your assistance instead.¹²⁷

Although Brezhnev undoubtedly assumed that the Czechoslovak leaders shared his understanding of the “obligations” and “promises” they had taken on at Čierna, no such common understanding actually existed. In the absence of a written set of specific pledges, the two sides left the meeting with very different conceptions of what they had agreed to.¹²⁸ Despite the hopes that both parties attached to the upcoming Bratislava conference, the gulf between the KSČ and CPSU was rapidly becoming irreconcilable, and Brezhnev’s vow to “give unlimited help” to the “healthy forces” in Czechoslovakia loomed ever larger.

The multilateral meeting in Bratislava was held on August 3, just two days after the Čierna negotiations ended. At the close of the day-long meeting, Dubček agreed to sign a joint declaration that included ominous references to “the common international *duty* of all socialist countries to support, strengthen, and defend the gains of socialism.”¹²⁹

¹²⁷ “Záznam jednání předsednictva ÚV KSČ a ÚV KSSS v Čierna n. T., 29.7.-1.8.1968,” L. 349.

¹²⁸ See, for example, “Informace z jednání v Č. n. Tisou,” August 1, 1968 (Top Secret), in VHA, F. Sekretariát MNO, 1968–1969, 161/282 and 162/283.

¹²⁹ “Zayavlenie kommunisticheskikh i rabochikh partii sotsialisticheskikh stran,” *Pravda* (Moscow), August 4, 1968, 1 (emphasis added).

This phrase was cited repeatedly after August 1968 as a justification for the invasion. More important than the declaration, however, was the opportunity that the Bratislava conference gave to the anti-reformist members of the KSČ Presidium, led by Bil'ak. Aided by the KGB station chief in Bratislava, Bil'ak was finally able to transmit to Shelest the promised letter "requesting" Soviet military intervention.¹³⁰ Shelest promptly conveyed the document to Brezhnev, who expressed deep gratitude. Contrary to what has often been thought, the "letter of invitation" was not intended to provide a legal basis for Soviet military action in 1968. Shelest had assured Bil'ak from the very start that the letter would be kept secret and that the names of the signatories would not be released. Those assurances would have made no sense if the letter had been sought as a legal pretext. Instead, Soviet leaders viewed the document as a way of credibly committing the signatories to seize power when allied military units entered Czechoslovakia. With the letter in hand, the Soviet Union had much greater "freedom of action" (to use Shelest's phrase) during the crucial two-and-a-half weeks after the Bratislava conference.¹³¹

The pressure generated by the bilateral and multilateral meetings in July and early August was reinforced by large-scale exercises and maneuvers that Soviet military forces were conducting with other Warsaw Pact armies. The joint exercises had begun in late March, and from then on the Soviet Union and its allies had engaged in almost

¹³⁰ It seems likely that more than one "letter of invitation" was handed over. The version released by the Russian government in 1992 and published in "Kdo pozval okupační vojska: Dokumenty s razítkem nikdy neotvirat vydaly svědectví," *Hospodářské noviny* (Prague), July 17, 1992, 1–2, contains five signatures: Bil'ak, Alois Indra, Oldřich Švestka, Antonín Kapek, and Drahomír Kolder. However, Shelest's detailed account of this episode ("Dnevniki P. E. Shelesta," in RGASPI, F. 666, Te. 6, Ll. 83–85) refers to a letter with eleven, not five, signatures. The six additional signatories mentioned by Shelest are Emil Rigo, Jan Piller, František Barbírek, Lubomír Štrougal, Jan Lenart, and Karel Hoffmann. In his memoirs, Bil'ak acknowledged that he had passed on a letter urging the Soviet Army to lend "fraternal assistance," but he does not mention the number of signatories. See *Paměti Vasilu Bil'aka: Unikátní svědectví ze zakulisí KSČ*, 2 vols. (Prague: Agentura Cesty, 1991), vol. 2, 88.

¹³¹ "Dnevniki P. E. Shelesta," in RGASPI, F. 666, Te. 5, L. 85.

daily troop movements in or around Czechoslovakia.¹³² By late July and August, the joint maneuvers were designed not only to intimidate the KSČ leaders, but also to lay the groundwork for an invasion. Reconnaissance units scoured the best entry routes into Czechoslovakia and prepared the logistics. The Soviet press devoted unusually prominent coverage to all these maneuvers in tones reminiscent of war reports, thus accentuating the psychological pressure on the Czechoslovak government.¹³³ Even then, however, Soviet power proved of little efficacy, as all manner of troop movements, thinly veiled threats, and political and economic coercion failed to deflect the KSČ from its course. Dubček in fact seemed to benefit domestically the stronger the pressure from his Warsaw Pact allies became.

The Invasion

As the crisis intensified in late July and August, the high-level debate in Moscow gradually produced a consensus. After the Warsaw meeting, a few key members of the Soviet Politburo had still hoped to avoid military action; but after the Čierna and Bratislava conferences, sentiment in favor of military intervention steadily grew. The Politburo had tentatively decided at its meetings on July 22 and 26–27 to proceed with a full-scale invasion sometime in mid- to late August if the situation in Czechoslovakia did not fundamentally change for the better. The receipt of the long-awaited “letter of invitation” from Bil’ak and his fellow hardliners, coupled with Dubček’s failure to carry out the

¹³² For a brief summary of the ten exercises conducted in 1968, see Jeffrey Simon, *Warsaw Pact Forces: Problems of Command and Control* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985), 44–50.

¹³³ See, for example, “Ucheniya organov tyła,” *Krasnaya zvezda* (Moscow), July 24, 1968, 1; the daily reports in *Krasnaya zvezda* (Moscow) entitled “Iz raiona uchenii organov tyła”; “Ucheniya ‘Nebesnyi shchit’,” *Krasnaya zvezda* (Moscow), July 25, 1968, 1; “Chasovye neba Rodiny,” *Krasnaya zvezda* (Moscow), July 26, 1968, 1; “Na ucheniyakh ‘Nebesnyi shchit’: Ispytanie boem,” *Krasnaya zvezda* (Moscow), July 30, 1968, 1; “Nadezhnyi shchit Rodiny: K itogam uchenii Voisk PVO strany,” *Krasnaya zvezda* (Moscow), August 1, 1968, 1; “Ukreplenie boegotovnosti—nasha glavnaya zadacha,” *Krasnaya zvezda* (Moscow), August 13, 1968, 1; and the daily reports in *Krasnaya zvezda* (Moscow) under the title “Iz raiona sovmeŝtnykh uchenii voisk svyazi.”

“obligations” he had supposedly undertaken at Čierna and Bratislava, reinforced the decision to intervene. By the time the Soviet Politburo met in an expanded session on August 6 to review the Čierna and Bratislava negotiations, there was essentially no hope left that military action could be averted. Although a few participants in the session voiced reservations about the potential costs of an invasion—especially if, as Marshal Grechko warned, the incoming troops were to encounter armed resistance—the Politburo reached a consensus on August 6 to proceed with full-scale military intervention unless the Czechoslovak authorities took immediate, drastic steps to comply with Soviet demands. No specific timetable was set, but Soviet leaders realized that an invasion would have to occur sometime before the KSČ’s Extraordinary Fourteenth Congress in September and, preferably, before the Slovak Party Congress that was scheduled to start on August 26. If the Slovak Party Congress convened and removed Bil’ak as the party’s leader, this would complicate his efforts to establish a hardline regime in Czechoslovakia after Soviet troops moved in. The CPSU Politburo’s consensus did not yet signify an irrevocable decision to invade, but it did mean that Soviet leaders were on the verge of giving up hope that “anything more can be expected” of Dubček.¹³⁴

In the meantime, the Soviet High Command was completing the extensive logistical and technical preparations needed for a full-scale invasion.¹³⁵ The largest of the Warsaw Pact maneuvers in early August was accompanied by a mass call-up of Soviet and East European reservists, the requisitioning of civilian vehicles and equipment, and the

¹³⁴ “Rabochaya zapis’ zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS ot 6 avgusta 1968 g.,” Verbatim Transcript (Top Secret), August 6, 1968, in APRF, F. 3, Op. 45, D. 99, L. 462.

¹³⁵ On these preparations, see “Záznam z jednání sovětských generálů Tutarinova, Provalova a Maruščaka s náčelníkem generálního štábu MLA generálem Csémi o přípravě operace ‘Dunaj’,” Memorandum of Conversation (Top Secret), July 27, 1968, in ÚSD-SK, Materials of J. Pataki, NHKI, 5/12/11; “Depeše čs. titulárů z Berlína, Varšavy a Budapešti z 29. 7.—1. 8. 1968 o pohybu vojsk kolem hranic Československa,” Cables (Secret), July–August 1968, in Archiv Ministerstva zahraničních věcí, Prague, Depeše Nos. 7103, 7187, 7259, and 7269/1968; “Setkání ministrů obrany,” *Mladá fronta* (Prague), August 17, 1968, 2; “Grečko v Polsku,” *Rudé právo* (Prague), August 18, 1968, 2; and “Cvičení v Maďarsku,” *Mladá fronta* (Prague), August 17, 1968, 2.

stockpiling of fuel, ammunition, communications gear, spare parts, and medical supplies. In Ukraine alone, more than 7,000 civilian vehicles and huge stocks of food and fuel were reassigned to the army.¹³⁶ Soviet commanders also diverted Czechoslovak supplies of fuel and ammunition to East Germany—ostensibly for new Warsaw Pact “exercises,” but actually to obviate any possibility of Czechoslovak armed resistance. Much the same was done with Czechoslovak troops and equipment, which were unexpectedly transported for “maneuvers” to bases in southwestern Bohemia, far away from any planned invasion routes. Even if ČLA commanders had been determined to put up large-scale armed resistance against Soviet troops—General Prchlík’s proposals for such measures had been categorically turned down, and none of the necessary preparations were ever carried out—the Soviet deception campaign and the size of the invading force effectively eliminated any options of this sort.

Even as the tentative date for an invasion approached, Brezhnev seemed to hold out a very faint hope that Dubček might yet reverse course. The strain of the crisis was beginning to take a serious toll on Brezhnev’s health, but he was still determined to avoid resorting to military action unless all other options had been exhausted.¹³⁷ Although he confided to his aides that he was deeply worried about “losing Czechoslovakia” and about “being removed from [his] post as General Secretary,” he also was concerned that a military invasion would exact high political costs of its own.¹³⁸ He and other Soviet leaders were on vacation in the Crimea during the second week of August, as was customary at that time of year. But the Soviet ambassador in Prague, Stepan Chervonenko, met with Dubček on several occasions in mid-August on Brezhnev’s behalf. Moreover, Brezhnev himself kept in close touch with Dubček by phone throughout that time. In a phone conversation with Dubček on August 9, Brezhnev emphasized how

¹³⁶ “Dnevnik P. E. Shelesta,” in RGASPI, F. 666, Te. 6, L. 53.

¹³⁷ A firsthand account of Brezhnev’s medical problems during the crisis can be found in the memoir by Brezhnev’s physician, Evgenii Chazov, *Zdorov’e i vlast’: Vospominaniya “kremlevskogo vracha”* (Moscow: Novosti, 1992), 74–76.

¹³⁸ Quoted in an interview with Brezhnev’s closest aides in Leonid Shinkarev, “Avgustovskoe bezumie: K 25-letiyu vvoda voisk v Chekhoslovakiyu,” *Izvestiya* (Moscow), August 21, 1993, 10.

“very serious” the situation had become, and he urged Dubček to act immediately in accordance with “the conditions we jointly approved and agreed on at Čierna nad Tisou.”¹³⁹ But in a follow-up conversation four days later, Brezhnev was far more aggressive and belligerent, accusing Dubček of “outright deceit” and of “blatantly sabotaging the agreements reached at Čierna and Bratislava.”¹⁴⁰ The Soviet leader pointedly warned him that “an entirely new situation had emerged,” which was “forcing [the Soviet Union] to consider new independent measures that would defend both the KSC and the cause of socialism in Czechoslovakia.”

To make matters worse, some of Dubček’s remarks during the second conversation, especially his insistence that Soviet leaders should “adopt whatever measures you believe are necessary,” may have been construed by Brezhnev as a tacit green light for military intervention.¹⁴¹ Brezhnev warned Dubček that the Soviet Politburo would “indeed be adopting the measures we believe are appropriate,” and he noted that “such measures would be easier for us to adopt if you and your comrades would more openly say that these are the measures you are expecting of us.” Dubček’s response to this warning—to wit, that “we [in Prague] are able to resolve all these matters on our own, but if you believe it is necessary for you to adopt certain measures, then by all means go ahead”—must have seemed to Brezhnev like a further hint that Dubček would acquiesce, if only grudgingly, in Soviet military action. This was certainly *not* the impression that Dubček wanted to convey, but a miscommunication in such tense and stressful circumstances would hardly be unusual. Thus, the phone call on the 13th may have ended up worsening the situation not only by reinforcing Brezhnev’s belief that Dubček would not “fulfill his obligations” if left to his own devices, but also by prompting Brezhnev to conclude that Dubček and perhaps other high-ranking KSC officials had now resigned themselves to the prospect of Soviet military intervention.

¹³⁹ “Telefonický rozhovor L. Brežněva s A. Dubčekem, 9.8.1968,” Verbatim Transcript (Top Secret), August 9, 1968, in ÚSD-SK, Z/S 8.

¹⁴⁰ “Rozgovor tovarishcha L. I. Brezhneva s tovarishchom A. S. Dubchekom,” Verbatim Transcript (Top Secret), August 13, 1968, in APRF, F. 3, Op. 91, D. 120, Ll. 1–18.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

Soon after the phone conversation on the 13th, Brezhnev sent an urgent cable to Chervonenko ordering him to meet with Dubček as soon as possible to reemphasize Moscow's concerns.¹⁴² Chervonenko did so that same evening, but his efforts, too, were of no avail. The failure of these different contacts seems to have been what finally led Brezhnev to conclude that "nothing more can be expected from the current KSČ CC Presidium" and that a military solution could no longer be avoided.¹⁴³ From then on, the dynamic of the whole situation changed. Although Brezhnev remained in the Crimea for a few days after the 13th, he was busy conferring directly with other senior members of the CPSU Politburo and Secretariat, most of whom were vacationing nearby.¹⁴⁴ Ad-hoc sessions of the Politburo were convened on August 13, 14, and 15 to discuss appropriate responses. The participants acknowledged that a military solution "would be fraught with complications," but they all agreed that a failure to act "would lead to civil war in Czechoslovakia and the loss of it as a socialist country."¹⁴⁵ On August 14, Brezhnev authorized a resumption of harsh press attacks on the Prague Spring, putting an end to the lull that had followed the Čierna and Bratislava conferences.¹⁴⁶ The Soviet leader also sent a stern letter to Dubček dated August 13 on behalf of the full CPSU Politburo, and he followed it up three days later with a personal letter

¹⁴² "Vypiska iz protokola No. 94 zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS 13 avgusta 1968 g.," No. P94/101 (Top Secret), in APRF, Prot. No. 38.

¹⁴³ Cited in Tibor Huszár, 1968: *Prága, Budapest, Moszkva. Kádár János és a csehszlovákiai intervenció* (Budapest: Szabad Tér, 1998), 180. For a translation into Czech, see "Vystoupení J. Kádára na zasedání ÚV MSDS a rady ministrů 23.8.1968 k mad'arsko-sovětskému jednání v Jaltě, 12.-15.8.1968," in ÚSD-SK, Z/M 19.

¹⁴⁴ Declassified documents reveal that Brezhnev met several times in the Crimea with Aleksei Kosygin, Nikolai Podgornyi, Petro Shelest, Mikhail Suslov, Aleksandr Shelepin, Arvids Pel'she, Kirill Mazurov, Gennadii Voronov, Viktor Grishin, Dinmukhamed Kunaev, Pyotr Masherov, Sharaf Rashidov, Vladimir Shcherbitskii, and Konstantin Katushev.

¹⁴⁵ For a valuable, firsthand account, see "Dnevnik P. E. Shelesta," in RGASPI, F. 666, Te. 6, L. 190. Evidently, no full transcript of the ad-hoc sessions was compiled.

¹⁴⁶ See, for example, Yurii Zhukov, "Podstrekateli," *Pravda* (Moscow), August 16, 1968, 4.

(which itself was approved by the Politburo).¹⁴⁷ Both letters emphasized the urgency of the situation and warned of dire consequences unless immediate changes were made. It is questionable, however, whether anything Dubček could have done at this point would have been enough to forestall the invasion.

On August 16, a formal session of the CPSU Politburo was convened in Moscow at Brezhnev's behest, even though he and several of his colleagues had not yet returned from the Crimea. The session was chaired by Andrei Kirilenko, one of Brezhnev's closest aides, who presented the latest assessments from the CPSU General Secretary and from the Politburo's commission on Czechoslovakia.¹⁴⁸ By this point, the debate about what to do in Czechoslovakia had come to an end. On August 17, with all the top leaders back in Moscow, the Soviet Politburo reconvened and voted unanimously to "provide assistance and support to the Communist Party and people of Czechoslovakia through the use of [the Soviet] armed forces."¹⁴⁹

The following day, Brezhnev informed his East German, Polish, Bulgarian, and Hungarian counterparts of the decision at a hastily convened meeting in Moscow.¹⁵⁰ Similar briefings were held in Moscow on August 19 for the members of the CPSU Central Committee and the heads of union-republic, oblast, and city party organizations, all of whom were ordered to prepare their members for what was to come. When the briefings on the 19th were over, the CPSU Politburo convened for several hours to review the military-political aspects of the

¹⁴⁷ The letters are stored in NAČR, Arch. ÚV KSČ, F. 02/1 (August 13) and NAČR, Arch. ÚV KSČ, F. 07/15, Zahr. kor. No. 822, respectively. The text of the second letter is also available in "Co psal Brežněv Dubčekovi: Hovori dosud neveřejnené dokumenty," *Rudé právo* (Prague), May 14, 1990, 1–2.

¹⁴⁸ "Rabochaya zapis' zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS ot 16 avgusta 1968 g.," Verbatim Transcript (Top Secret), August 16, 1968, in APRF, F. 3, Op. 45, D. 99, Ll. 469–471.

¹⁴⁹ "K voprosu o polozhenii v Chekhoslovakii: Vypiska iz protokola No. 95 zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK ot 17 avgusta 1968 g.," No. P95/1 (Top Secret), August 17, 1968, in APRF, Prot. No. 38.

¹⁵⁰ "Stenogramma Soveshchaniya predstavitelei kommunisticheskikh i rabochikh partii i pravitel'stv NRB, VNR, GDR, PNR i SSSR po voprosu o polozhenii v Chekhoslovakii," Verbatim Transcript (Top Secret), August 18, 1968, in Arch. Kom., Z/S 22.

upcoming operation.¹⁵¹ Detailed presentations by Grechko and the chief of the Soviet General Staff, Marshal Matvei Zakharov, provided grounds for optimism about the military side of Operation Danube, but questions about the political side received less scrutiny. Even though Brezhnev expressed confidence that the KSČ hardliners led by Bil'ak would carry out their plan, at least a few members of the Soviet Politburo were doubtful about what would happen "after our troops enter Czechoslovakia."¹⁵²

With the zero-hour set for midnight on the night of August 20–21, Soviet leaders remained in close contact with their East European counterparts. Unlike in 1956, when Soviet troops intervened in Hungary unilaterally after Khrushchev turned down offers of assistance from Romania and Czechoslovakia, Brezhnev was determined to give the invasion in 1968 a multilateral appearance. Some 70,000 to 80,000 combat soldiers from Poland, Bulgaria, and Hungary, as well as a token liaison unit from the GDR, ended up taking part. The initial plan had been for East German combat troops to participate as well, but that idea was abandoned after both Gomulka and the KSČ hardliners warned Soviet leaders that the entry of German troops onto Czechoslovak soil would have highly undesirable connotations.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ "Rabochaya zapis' zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS ot 19 avgusta 1968 g.," Verbatim Transcript (Top Secret), August 19, 1968, in APRF, F. 3, Op. 45, D. 99, Ll. 474–482.

¹⁵² Comments recorded in "Dnevnik P. E. Shelesta," in RGASPI, F. 666, Te. 6, L. 93.

¹⁵³ On this point, see Gomulka's secret speech on August 29, 1968, to the PZPR Central Committee, reproduced in "Gomulka o inwazji na Czechosłowację w sierpniu '68: Mysmy ich zaskoczyli akcja wojskowa," *Polityka* (Warsaw), no. 35 (August 29, 1992), 13. The most authoritative analyses of the role of the GDR's *Nationale Volksarmee* (NVA) during the invasion have been produced by Rüdiger Wenzke, including his *Prager Frühling—Prager Herbst: Zur Intervention der Warschauer-Pakt-Streitkräfte in der ČSSR 1968, Fakten und Zusammenhänge* (Berlin: Dunckere Humblot, 1990); and *Die NVA und der Prager Frühling 1968: Die Rolle Ulbrichts unter der DDR-Streitkräfte bei der Niederschlagung der tschechoslowakischen Reformbewegung* (Berlin: Links Verlag, 1995). See also the lively exchange prompted by the earlier of these publications: Walter Rehm, "Neue Erkenntnisse über die Rolle der NVA bei der Besetzung der ČSSR im August 1968," *Deutschland Archiv* 24, no. 2 (February 1991), 173–185; and Rüdiger Wenzke, "Zur Beteiligung der NVA an der militärischen Operation

Despite the participation of East European troops in Operation Danube (the code-name of the invasion), the intervention was only nominally a “joint” undertaking. Soviet paratroopers and KGB special operations forces spearheaded the invasion, and a total of some 350,000 to 400,000 Soviet troops eventually moved into Czechoslovakia, roughly five times the number of East European forces. Moreover, the invasion was under the direct control of the Soviet High Command at all times, rather than being left under the command of Warsaw Pact officers as originally planned.¹⁵⁴ Until August 17 the commander-in-chief of the Warsaw Pact’s Joint Forces, Marshal Ivan Yakubovskii, had been designated to oversee Operation Danube, but the Soviet Politburo accepted Defense Minister Grechko’s recommendation that command of all forces be transferred to Army-General Ivan Pavlovskii, the commander-in-chief of the Soviet Ground Forces. Some CPSU officials were concerned that this last-minute change might prove disruptive, but it ended up having almost no discernible effect on the conduct of the operation.

When the first Soviet troops crossed the border, Marshal Grechko phoned the Czechoslovak national defense minister, General Martin Džúr, and warned him that if ČLA units fired “even a single shot” in resistance, the Soviet Army would “crush the resistance mercilessly” and Džúr himself would “be strung up from a telephone pole and shot.”¹⁵⁵ Džúr heeded the warning by ordering all Czechoslovak troops to remain in their barracks indefinitely, to avoid the use of weapons for any purpose, and to offer “all necessary assistance to the

von Warschauer-Pakt-Streitkräften gegen die ČSSR 1968: Einige Ergänzungen zu einem Beitrag von Walter Rehm,” *Deutschland Archiv* 24, no. 11 (November 1991), 1179–1186. Wenzke returned to these points plus many others in his 1995 study.

¹⁵⁴ See the interview with the supreme commander of the invasion, Army-General Ivan Pavlovskii, in “Eto bylo v Prage,” *Izvestiya* (Moscow), August 19, 1968, 5.

¹⁵⁵ Cited in “Dnevnik P. E. Shelesta,” in RGASPI, F. 666, Te. 6, 93–94. See also the interview with Shelest in Leonid Shinkarev, “Avgustovskoe bezumie: K 25-letiyu vvoda voisk v Chekhoslovakiyu,” *Izvestiya* (Moscow), August 21, 1993, 10, and the recollections of Pavlovskii in “Eto bylo v Prage,” 5.

Soviet forces.”¹⁵⁶ A similar directive was issued by the Czechoslovak president and commander-in-chief, Ludvík Svoboda, after he was informed of the invasion—in more cordial terms—by the Soviet ambassador, Chervonenko, shortly before midnight.¹⁵⁷ Neither Džúr nor Svoboda welcomed the invasion, but they had no inclination at all to try to rebuff it. Both men believed that armed resistance, even if it were desirable, would merely lead to widespread, futile bloodshed. The KSČ Presidium and the Czechoslovak government also promptly instructed the ČLA and People’s Militia not to put up active opposition; and the Soviet commander of the invasion, General Pavlovskii, issued a prepared statement in the name of the Soviet High Command urging the ČLA to remain inactive.¹⁵⁸ As a result of these multiple appeals, the incoming Soviet and allied troops encountered no armed resistance at all.

Within hours, the Soviet-led units had seized control of Czechoslovakia’s transportation and communications networks and had surrounded all the main KSČ and government buildings in Prague, Bratislava, and other cities. Soviet troops then began methodically occupying key sites and setting up new communications and broadcasting facilities. Soviet transport aircraft flew dozens of sorties every hour to bring in tens of thousands of additional soldiers and large quantities of weaponry. In the early morning hours of the 21st, Soviet commandos from the elite Taman division, accompanied by KGB troops and Czechoslovak State Security forces, entered the KSČ Central Committee headquarters and arrested Dubček and the other reformist members of the KSČ Presidium (except for Prime Minister Černík, who had been seized earlier at his office in the government ministers’ build-

¹⁵⁶ “Obdobie od 21.srpna do konca roku 1968,” Report to the ČSSR National Assembly (Secret), by National Defense Minister General Martin Džúr, June 9, 1970, in NACR, Arch. ÚV KSČ, F. 07/15, File for G. Husák.

¹⁵⁷ See the “extremely urgent” (*vne ocheredi*) cable from Chervonenko to the CPSU Politburo, August 21, 1968, in ÚSD-SK, Arch. Komise, Z/S—MID, Nos. 37 and 39.

¹⁵⁸ “Prohlášení předsednictva ÚV KSČ z 21.8.1968,” *Prace* (Prague), August 21, 1968 (2nd ed.), 1. For Pavlovskii’s statement, see “Obrashchenie Chekhoslovatskoi narodnoi armii,” in AVPRF, F. 059, Op. 58, Papka (P.) 127, D. 586, Ll. 33–35.

ing). The Soviet troops then sealed off the building and spirited the captured officials to a detention center in the Soviet Union.¹⁵⁹

By the time the KSČ leaders were carted off, the whole of Czechoslovakia was under Soviet military control. The Prague Spring, and its promise of “socialism with a human face,” had come to an end.

Soviet Political Miscalculations

Decisive as the military results of Operation Danube may have been, they seemed rather hollow when the invasion failed to achieve its immediate political aims.¹⁶⁰ The Soviet Union’s chief political objective on August 20–21 was to facilitate a rapid transition to a pro-Moscow “revolutionary peasants’ and workers’ government.” That objective failed to materialize when the “healthy forces” in Czechoslovakia were unable to gain majority support on the KSČ Presidium.¹⁶¹ The resulting confusion was well described in an emergency cable to Moscow from Kirill Mazurov, a Soviet Politburo member who had been sent to Czechoslovakia on August 20 to monitor and help direct Operation Danube. Mazurov reported that the KSČ hardliners had “gone a bit haywire” and “lost their nerve when Soviet military units were slightly late in arriving” at the KSČ Central Committee headquarters.¹⁶² Over the next several hours, the KSČ Presidium’s statement condemning the invasion, which

¹⁵⁹ For firsthand accounts, see “Nedokončený rozhovor,” 16–18; Zdeněk Mlynář, *Nachtfrost: Erfahrungen auf dem Weg vom realen zum menschlichen Sozialismus* (Cologne: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1978), 181–187; František August and David Rees, *Red Star Over Prague* (London: Sherwood Press, 1984), 134–142; Dubček, *Hope Dies Last*, 182–184; and Historický ústav ČSAV, *Sedm pražských dnů, 21.-27. srpen 1968: Dokumentace* (Prague: ČSAV, September 1968), 53–58. On Černík’s arrest, see the firsthand account by Otomar Boček, Chairman of the Supreme Court, delivered to the Fourteenth Congress in Vysočany, in Jiří Pelikán, ed., *Tanky proti sjezdu: Protokol a dokumenty XIV. sjezdu KSČ* (Vienna: Europa-Verlag, 1970), 66–68.

¹⁶⁰ The military operation itself was not wholly flawless, as Leo Heiman points out in his “Soviet Invasion Weaknesses,” *Military Review* 49, no. 8 (August 1969), 38–45. However, the same is true of almost any large-scale use of military force against a foreign country. Unexpected glitches are bound to arise.

¹⁶¹ “Prohlášení předsednictva ÚV KSČ z 21.8.1968,” 1.

¹⁶² “Shifttelegramma,” Encrypted Telegram (Top Secret), from K. Mazurov to the CPSU Politburo, August 21, 1968, in AVPRF, F. 059, Op. 58, P. 124,

passed by a 7-to-4 vote shortly after news of the military action came in, was broadcast repeatedly over radio and television and was published on the front page of *Rudé právo* on August 21. These developments, according to Mazurov, caused even greater disarray and panic among the “healthy forces,” who were “unable to recover from the shock.”¹⁶³

Despite this setback, Soviet leaders were reluctant to abandon their initial plan, apparently because they had neglected to devise any fallback options. It is surprising, even in retrospect, that they would have committed themselves so heavily to such a dubious strategy without having devised a viable alternative. Part of the problem was that the information flowing into the Soviet Politburo from Shelest, from embassy officials in Prague, from KGB sources, and from Czechoslovak hardliners was unduly optimistic about this issue. In August, Shelest and other officials had assured the CPSU Politburo that the “healthy forces in the KSČ Presidium have finally consolidated themselves and closed their ranks so that they are now a majority.”¹⁶⁴ Soviet leaders genuinely expected that the invasion would earn widespread official and popular support (or at least acquiescence) once the “right-wing opportunists” in the KSČ had been removed and the initial shock of the invasion had worn off. Although the plans called for martial law to be imposed in certain parts of Czechoslovakia on August 21, that was regarded as a temporary and selective measure that could be lifted as soon as a “revolutionary government” was in place and the “anti-socialist” and “counter-revolutionary” forces had been neutralized.¹⁶⁵

D. 574, Ll. 184–186. For Mazurov’s retrospective account of his role in the invasion, see “Eto bylo v Praze,” 5.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ “Shifrtelogramma,” Encrypted Telegram (Top Secret) from S.V. Chervonenko, Soviet ambassador in Czechoslovakia, to the CPSU Politburo, August 7, 1968, in AVPRF, F. 059, Op. 58, P. 124, D. 573, Ll. 183–185. For further relevant citations from the ex-Soviet archives, see Mark Kramer, “The Prague Spring and the Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia (Part 2): New Interpretations,” *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, no. 3 (Fall 1993), 6–8, 13, 54. See also Zdeněk Mlýnář, *Československý pokus o reformu, 1968: Analýza jeho teorie a praxe* (Cologne: Index, 1975), 232–233.

¹⁶⁵ “Rozkaz správce posádky číslo 1, Trenčín, 21. augusta 1968: Správca posádky Sovietskej armády podplukovník ŠMATKO,” Military Directive, August 21, 1968, in ÚSD-SK, Arch. Komise, A, from I. Šimovček. See also Historický ústav, *Sedm pražských dnů*, 123, 278–281, and 324–325.

The lack of any attempt by the invading troops to take over the functions of the Czechoslovak government or parliament, the very limited scale of the initial Soviet propaganda effort inside Czechoslovakia, and the meager quantity of provisions and fuel brought in by Soviet troops (because they assumed they would soon be resupplied by a friendly Czechoslovak government) all confirm that the Soviet Politburo was expecting a swift transition to a pro-Moscow regime.¹⁶⁶

Only after repeated efforts to set up a post-invasion government had decisively collapsed and the invasion had met with universal opposition in Czechoslovakia—both publicly and officially—did Soviet leaders get an inkling of what the real situation in Czechoslovakia was.¹⁶⁷ An internal Soviet Politburo report on the invasion, prepared by the commission on Czechoslovakia, conceded that “75 to 90 percent of the [Czechoslovak] population... regard the entry of Soviet troops as an act of occupation.”¹⁶⁸ Although Brezhnev and his colleagues acknowledged this point, they were loath to admit that they had fundamentally misread the political situation in Czechoslovakia. Instead, they ascribed the fiasco solely to the “cowardly behavior” of the “healthy forces” and the “lack of active propaganda work” by Soviet units.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ See “TsK KPSS,” Memorandum No. 24996 (Top Secret) from Aleksandr Yakovlev, deputy head of the CPSU Central Committee Propaganda Department, and Enver Mamedov, deputy head of Soviet television and radio, to the CPSU Politburo, September 6, 1968, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 19, Ll. 200–206; and “Nekotorye zamechaniya po voprosu podgotovki voenno-politicheskoi aktsii 21 avgusta 1968 g.,” Report to the CPSU Politburo (Special Dossier/Strictly Secret) from the Politburo commission on Czechoslovakia, November 16, 1968, in RGANI, F. 5 “OP,” Op. 6, D. 776, Ll. 128–144.

¹⁶⁷ “Shifrtellegrama,” Encrypted Telegram (Top Secret) from Kirill Mazurov to the CPSU Politburo, August 21, 1968, in AVPRF, F. 059, Op. 58, P. 124, D. 574, Ll. 184–186.

¹⁶⁸ “Nekotorye zamechaniya po voprosu podgotovki voenno-politicheskoi aktsii 21 avgusta 1968 g.,” L. 137.

¹⁶⁹ The first quotation is from the Soviet participants in a high-level “Warsaw Five” meeting shortly after the invasion, “Záznam ze schůzek Varšavské pětky v Moskvě ve dnech 24.-27.8.1968,” Verbatim Transcript (Top Secret), August 24–27, 1968, in ÚSD-SK, Z/M 21. The second quotation is from “Nekotorye zamechaniya po voprosu podgotovki voenno-politicheskoi aktsii 21 avgusta 1968 g.,” L. 129. This was also the view put forth by the four East European leaders of the “Warsaw Five.” See, for example, “Gomułka o inwazji na Czechosłowację w sierpniu ’68,” 13.

Faced with massive popular and official resistance in Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Politburo decided to open negotiations on August 23 with Dubček and the other KSČ officials who had been seized on the morning of the 21st. During four days of talks, the Czechoslovak leaders were in a very weak position, but the very fact that bargaining was taking place at all was indicative of the extent of Moscow's political miscalculations. On August 26 the two sides agreed to sign the Moscow Protocol, which forced the reversal of several elements of the Prague Spring, but also ensured the reinstatement of most of the leading reformers, including Dubček. Brezhnev's willingness to accept the return of key Czechoslovak officials did not go over well with some of his colleagues on the Politburo and with the hardline leaders in Eastern Europe. At a Warsaw Pact conclave on August 24, Gomulka insisted that Soviet and East European troops should be "ordered to combat the counter-revolution" and take "whatever steps are necessary" to "prevent rightists and counter-revolutionaries from regaining power."¹⁷⁰ In his view, "the situation in Hungary [in 1956] was better than in Czechoslovakia today." Gomulka's complaints were echoed by Ulbricht, who declared that "if Dubček and Černík are going to be back in the leadership, what was the point of sending in troops in the first place?"¹⁷¹ The KSČ reformers, according to Ulbricht, "deceived us at Čierna and Bratislava" and "will deceive us again." Both he and Gomulka joined Todor Zhivkov in demanding the imposition of a "military dictatorship" in Czechoslovakia and the removal of all those who had championed reforms. Their views were endorsed by Andropov, Shelest, Podgornyi, and a few other Soviet officials during a meeting of the CPSU Politburo the following day.¹⁷² Andropov proposed that a "revolutionary workers' and peasants' government" be installed in Prague, which would carry out mass arrests and repression. His suggestion was backed by another candidate Politburo member and CPSU Secretary, Dmitrii Ustinov, who emphasized that "we must give a free hand to our troops."

¹⁷⁰ "Záznam ze schůzek Varšavské pětky v Moskvě ve dnech 24.-27.8.1968," L. 3.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, L. 5.

¹⁷² "Rabochaya zapis' zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS ot 25 avgusta 1968 g.," Verbatim Transcript (Top Secret), August 25, 1968, in APRF, F. 3, Op. 45, D. 99, Ll. 484-491.

These calls for a much more vigorous (and presumably bloodier) military crackdown were rejected by Brezhnev, Kosygin, and other officials. Although Brezhnev was prepared, *in extremis*, to impose direct military rule in Czechoslovakia for as long as necessary, he and most of his colleagues clearly were hoping to come up with a more palatable solution first. The task of finding such a solution was seriously complicated, however, by the collapse of Moscow's initial political aims. The reinstatement of Dubček's government after the KSČ hardliners failed to set up a collaborationist regime enabled the reform program in Czechoslovakia to survive for some time. During the last few months of 1968, substantial leeway for economic and political reform continued, and the long-promised federalization of the Czechoslovak state was implemented on schedule (even though plans to federalize the Communist Party were cancelled under Soviet pressure). For a while, moreover, many of the top reformers held onto their posts, despite constant pressure from the Soviet Union. These developments underscored the limits of what Soviet military power could accomplish in the absence of a viable political strategy.

Consequences of the Invasion

Soon after the invasion, the Soviet Politburo concluded that the only way to prevent a resurgence of "counter-revolutionary and anti-socialist forces" in Czechoslovakia was by securing a formal bilateral treaty providing for a "temporary" Soviet troop presence on Czechoslovak soil. Soviet leaders publicly justified their decision to pursue a status-of-forces treaty in purely military terms (as being necessary to counter "West German militarism and revanchism"), but the transcripts from CPSU Politburo sessions and from a secret Warsaw Pact conference in September 1968 leave no doubt that Moscow's dominant motivation for seeking the agreement was to obtain greater leverage over Czechoslovakia's internal politics.¹⁷³ On October 16, 1968, a bilateral "Treaty on the Temporary Presence of Soviet Forces in Czechoslovakia" was

¹⁷³ "Stenografický záznam schůzky varšavské pětky v Moskvě z 27.9.1968 k situaci v Československu," Stenographic Transcript (Top Secret), September 27, 1968, in ÚSD-SK, Arch. Komise, Z/S 13.

signed with much fanfare, thus codifying what amounted to a permanent Soviet troop presence.¹⁷⁴ Czechoslovak leaders privately acknowledged that the document would “impose definite limits on the exercise of Czechoslovak state sovereignty” and that Soviet “troops will have a certain influence [on Czechoslovakia’s internal affairs] by the very fact of their presence.”¹⁷⁵ The extent of Soviet influence, however, turned out to be far greater and more lasting than most KSČ officials had anticipated.

Although the main purpose of the status-of-forces treaty was political—that is, it was intended to facilitate Soviet control over current and future political developments in Czechoslovakia—the military implications of the document were by no means insignificant. The establishment of a Central Group of Soviet Forces on Czechoslovak territory, numbering some five divisions (or roughly 70,000–80,000 troops), strengthened the Soviet Union’s ability to launch a rapid offensive against Western Europe. A top-secret report compiled by a senior CPSU official in December 1968 noted that the deployments had created “an entirely new situation in Europe, because Soviet forces will now be able to confront NATO all along the East-West divide, from the Baltic Sea to Bohemia.”¹⁷⁶ The creation of the Central Group of Forces thus provided a crucial link between the Soviet Union’s Northern Group of Forces in Poland, its Southern Group of Forces in Hungary, and the Group of Soviet Forces in Germany (which was later renamed the Western Group of Forces). The deployment of a Central Group of Forces also ensured that three long-planned storage sites for Soviet tactical nuclear warheads in Czechoslovakia could

¹⁷⁴ “Dogovor mezhdru pravitel’stvom Soyuzu Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik i pravitel’stvom Chekhoslovatskoi Sotsialisticheskoi Respubliki ob usloviyakh vremennogo prebyvaniya Sovetskikh voisk na territorii Chekhoslovatskoi Sotsialisticheskoi Respubliki,” *Pravda* (Moscow), October 19, 1968, 1.

¹⁷⁵ “K otázke Dohody mezi vládou Svazu sovětských socialistických republik a vládou Československé socialistické republiky o podmínkách dočasného pobytu sovětských vojsk na území Československé socialistické republiky,” Memorandum No. V-42 (Top Secret), from the KSČ Central Committee Ideological Department, to the KSČ Presidium, October 1968, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 19, Ll. 259–282.

¹⁷⁶ Memorandum No. 23923 (Top Secret) from L. Tolokonnikov to K. V. Rusakov, December 18, 1968, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 311, Ll. 155–170.

be safely completed and brought on line, thereby filling a key gap in Soviet nuclear preparations.¹⁷⁷ For the Soviet Army, the achievement of its long-standing goal of obtaining a permanent military presence in Czechoslovakia was at least as important as the political leverage that the status-of-forces treaty afforded.

In that sense, the treaty helped offset other military results of the invasion that were not so favorable. The growth of reformist sentiment in the Czechoslovak People's Army during the 1968 crisis had undermined Soviet confidence in the reliability of the ČLA, which is why no troops from the Czechoslovak army were given any role in Operation Danube (in contrast to selected units of the Czechoslovak State Security forces, who helped arrest KSČ leaders¹⁷⁸). The invasion itself was devastating to the morale of Czechoslovak soldiers, who were confined to their barracks for several days beginning on the night of August 20–21.¹⁷⁹ The morale of the ČLA was dealt a further blow when the incoming Soviet and East European troops began systematically disarming Czechoslovak soldiers, a process that continued long after it was clear that the ČLA would put up no resistance.¹⁸⁰ Moreover, the combat capability of the ČLA was severely eroded by the massive transfer of bases and facilities to Soviet units in October 1968 and by the subsequent purges of the Czechoslovak officer corps. The trauma of the invasion and post-invasion period was so great that Czechoslovakia's

¹⁷⁷ For further discussion of this matter, see Kramer, "The Prague Spring and the Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia (Part 2)," 9–12.

¹⁷⁸ It is worth noting, however, that neither the Czechoslovak State Security nor the KSČ People's Militia was wholly immune to the "winds of reform." See, for example, "O deyatel'nosti kontrrevolyutsionnogo podpol'ya v Chekhoslovakii," Memorandum No. 47/A/22 (Special Dossier/Top Secret) from KGB Chairman Yu. V. Andropov to the CPSU Secretariat, October 13, 1968, in RGANI, F. 4, Op. 21, D. 32, Ll. 99–157.

¹⁷⁹ "Rozkaz generála Provalova, velitele jižní skupiny intervenčních vojsk v odzbrojení jednotek ČSLA," Directive (Secret), August 26, 1968, in ÚSD-SK, N—VHA; and "Zpráva náčelníka generálního štábu ČSLA generála Rusova a náčelníka Hlavní politické zprávy generála Bedřicha na schůze předsednictva Národního shromáždění," Vertatim Transcript (Secret), August 26, 1968, in ÚSD-SK, O—Arch. Národního Shromáždění.

¹⁸⁰ See the items adduced in the previous footnote as well as "Zápis ze zasedání Vojenské rady MNO ČSSR," Verbatim Transcript (Top Secret), August 26, 1968, in ÚSD-SK, N—VHA, Sv. MNO-Vojenská Rada.

role in the Warsaw Pact strategy ultimately collapsed for many years.¹⁸¹ The once-impressive Czechoslovak ground and air forces, numbering some 230,000 troops—2,700 main battle tanks, 3,000 armored personnel carriers, and 600 combat aircraft in 1968—became a glaring weak point in the Warsaw Pact's Northern Tier, and Czechoslovak divisions no longer were expected to fill the main axis of advance running from Plzeň to Coblenz.

A further casualty of the invasion was the hope that Soviet leaders once had of giving much greater emphasis to "coalition warfare." The events of 1968 made clear that in the end the Soviet Union would have to rely predominantly on its own forces in Europe. Soviet confidence in the East European militaries was shaken not only by the turmoil in the KSČ, but also by the performance of the Polish, Hungarian, Bulgarian, and East German soldiers who took part in the invasion. The total number of East European troops involved was small (only about one-fifth the number of Soviet troops), and they engaged in no fighting. Their contribution was almost entirely symbolic. Thus, the invasion provided no test of the combat prowess of the four East European armies. The most it could show was whether soldiers from those armies were able to offer limited support when they encountered no armed resistance. Judged even by that very modest standard, the results were less than satisfactory. Signs of demoralization and disaffection cropped up among Polish soldiers stationed in northern Moravia and among Hungarian troops deployed in southern Slovakia, a region inhabited predominantly by ethnic Hungarians.¹⁸² Similarly,

¹⁸¹ J. Paulik, *Československá armáda po srpnu 1968* (Prague: Komise vlády ČSFR pro analýzu událostí 1967–1970 lat, 1992), 40–72. Soviet officials were aware of this possibility at the time; see, for example, Memorandum No. 23923 (Top Secret) from L. Tolokonnikov to K. V. Rusakov, head of the CPSU Central Committee Department for intra-bloc relations, December 18, 1968, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 311, Ll. 164–170; "O deyatel'nosti kontrevolyutsionnogo podpol'ya v Chekhoslovakii," Ll. 132–137; and "O politiko-moral'nom sostoyanii i boesposobnosti Chekhoslovatskoi Narodnoi Armii," Memorandum No. 85 (Top Secret) to the CPSU Politburo, February 1969 in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 61, D. 367, Ll. 37–45. See also the Soviet Defense Ministry's follow-up reports in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 61, D. 289.

¹⁸² On the general question of East European troop morale during and after the invasion, see Memorandum No. 2613-Ts (Top Secret) from

the morale of East German communications personnel (the only East German troops that actually took part in the invasion) declined when Czech protesters repeatedly accused them of serving as a “new Gestapo.”¹⁸³

Even if no such problems had arisen, confusion was bound to prevail among many of the East European units, who had been told they would be defending against American “imperialists” and West German “militarists” and “revanchists.” Under those circumstances, it was not surprising that most of the East European units were quickly pulled out. Nor was it surprising that Soviet leaders made no attempt to have any of the East European forces included under the bilateral status-of-forces treaty.¹⁸⁴ Although the invasion did not impose stringent demands on the East European armies, their performance still fell short of the mark.

For the Soviet Union itself, the crisis also revealed notable shortcomings. Soviet leaders were unable to prevent the reforms in Czechoslovakia from spilling over into the USSR, especially into Ukraine and other western republics.¹⁸⁵ Even after Soviet troops had crushed the Prague Spring, officials in Moscow were dismayed that “events

S. Tsvigun, deputy chairman of the KGB, to the CPSU Secretariat, November 19, 1968, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 311, Ll. 139–142. On the problems with Polish troops, see Lech Kowalski, *Kryptonim “Dunaj”: Udział wojsk polskich w interwencji zbrojnej w Czechosłowacji w 1968 roku* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1992), 180–191; and George Gomori, “Hungarian and Polish Attitudes on Czechoslovakia, 1968,” in E. J. Czerwinski and Jarosław Piekalkiewicz, eds., *The Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia: Its Effects on Eastern Europe* (New York: Praeger, 1972), esp. 109. The problems among Hungarian troops are discussed at length in “Uznesenie Mad’arskej revolučnej robotnícko-roľníckej vlády: ‘O stiahnutí mad’arských vojsk rozmiestnených v Československu,’” Resolution (Secret), September 16, 1968, in Archiv Komisia vlády Slovenskej Republiky pre analýzu historických udalostí z rokov 1967–1970, F. Generálny konzulát MĽR, A.j. 2, 224–225.

¹⁸³ Thomas M. Forster, *Die NVA—Kernstück der Landesverteidigung der DDR*, 5th ed. (Cologne: Markus-Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, 1979), 93.

¹⁸⁴ “Stenografický záznam schůzky varšavské pětky v Moskvě z 27.9.1968 k situaci v Československu”; and “Stenografický záznam Československo-sovětského jednání v Moskvě ve dnech 3.-4. října 1968,” Stenographic Transcript (Top Secret), October 3–4, 1968, in Arch. Komise, Z/S 14.

¹⁸⁵ See the sources adduced in Notes 100 and 101 *supra*.

in Czechoslovakia are still giving rise to illegal nationalist activities" in Ukraine.¹⁸⁶ Soviet leaders claimed that Ukrainian nationalists were "hoping to exploit the latest events in Czechoslovakia to disseminate vile sentiments and malicious fabrications" and to sow "bourgeois nationalist ideas about an 'independent Ukraine.'"¹⁸⁷ Shelest reported that "anti-Soviet" graffiti and thousands of leaflets condemning the invasion had turned up in Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities.¹⁸⁸ The spillover ultimately was contained, but at the price of a stifling political clampdown. Whatever room there may have been before 1968 for discussion of political and economic reform in the Soviet Union, the invasion helped put an end to it. Brezhnev and his colleagues became increasingly unwilling to undertake reforms of any sort. Their aversion to change merely exacerbated the political and economic weaknesses of the Soviet Union that had been conducive to a spillover from the Prague Spring in the first place.

The invasion entailed further costs for the Soviet Union in terms of relations with certain communist countries, not least Czechoslovakia. Shortly after the invasion, Soviet leaders privately acknowledged that "90 percent of the Czechoslovak population believe that the entry of Soviet troops was an act of occupation."¹⁸⁹ Reports from Soviet diplomats in Czechoslovakia in late 1968 confirmed that even most members of the KSČ viewed the invasion in "highly negative" terms.¹⁹⁰ The anger and widespread resentment toward the Soviet Union had to be countered by sustained repression and "normalization," and even then, popular sentiments were only suppressed, not eliminated. Moscow's goal of restoring cohesion to the Eastern bloc in 1968 permanently

¹⁸⁶ "TsK KPSS: O nastroeniyakh dukhovenstva v svyazi s chekhoslovatskimi sobytiyami," Report No. 25583 (Secret) from V. Kuroedov, chairman of the Council on Religious Affairs of the USSR Council of Ministers, September 11, 1968, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 24, Ll. 150, 153–156.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, L. 154.

¹⁸⁸ "Dnevnik P. E. Shelesta," in RGASPI, F. 666, Te. 7, L. 4.

¹⁸⁹ "Nekotorye zamechaniya po voprosu podgotovki voenno-politicheskoi aktsii 21 avgusta 1968 g.," L. 129.

¹⁹⁰ "Informatsiya o družeskikh svyazyakh oblastei i gorodov Ukrainskoi SSR s oblastyami, voevodstvami, okrugami, uezdami i gorodami sotsialisticheskikh stran v 1968 godu," Memorandum No. 337 (Secret) to the CPSU Central Committee, December 20, 1968, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 2, Ll. 46, 64–65.

alienated the vast majority of Czechs and Slovaks. This price may have seemed worth paying at the time, but it guaranteed that the Czechoslovak regime would be unable to regain a semblance of popular legitimacy, and would be forced instead to depend on Soviet military backing. If Soviet leaders had once hoped that "stability" in the Eastern bloc could be maintained by something other than coercion, the 1968 invasion put an end to those hopes.

Quite apart from this longer-term cost, the invasion had the immediate effect of deepening fissures elsewhere in the Warsaw Pact. Albania, which had been only a nominal member of the alliance since 1961, protested the intervention by severing its last remaining ties with the Pact and aligning itself ever more firmly with China. The invasion also led to acute tensions between Romania and the Soviet Union. Ceaușescu refused to let Bulgarian troops pass through Romania on their way to Czechoslovakia (they were airlifted to Ukraine instead), and he promptly condemned the invasion. Some observers at the time even thought that a complete rupture would ensue, but the actual effect was more mixed. On the one hand, Ceaușescu soon toned down his rhetoric and sought to mend relations with the other Warsaw Pact countries.¹⁹¹ Over time, Romanian foreign policy came further back into line with the rest of the bloc, and Soviet leaders were no longer

¹⁹¹ "Zapis' besedy s General'nym sekretarem TsK RKP Nikolae Chaushesku, 23 avgusta 1968 goda," Cable No. 847 (Secret) from A. V. Basov, Soviet ambassador in Romania, to the CPSU Secretariat, August 25, 1968, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 6, D. 339, Ll. 47–53; "Zapis' besedy s poslom SFRYu v Bukhareste Ya. Petrichem, 2 sentyabrya 1968 goda," Cable No. 917 (Secret) from A.V. Basov, Soviet ambassador to Romania, to the CPSU Secretariat, September 5, 1968, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 339, Ll. 69–72; "Zapis' besedy s general'nym sekretarem TsK RKP N. Chaushesku, 3 sentyabrya 1968 goda," Cable No. 915 (Secret) from A. V. Basov, Soviet ambassador in Romania, to the CPSU Politburo and Secretariat, September 5, 1968, in RGANI, F. Op. 60, D. 339, Ll. 73–80; "O nekotorykh problemakh sovetsko-rumynskikh otnoshenii v svete pozitsii, zanyatoi rukovodstvom RKP v svyazi s sobytiyami v Chekhoslovakii," Report No. 686 (Top Secret) from A. V. Basov, Soviet ambassador in Romania, to the CPSU Politburo, September 23, 1968, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 339, Ll. 106–121; and "O pozitsii Rumynii v svyazi s sobytiyami v Chekhoslovakii," Report No. MB-4809/GS (Top Secret) from B. Makashev, deputy secretary-general of the Soviet Foreign Ministry, to the CPSU Secretariat, October 16, 1968, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 339, Ll. 188–194.

so fearful that Ceaușescu would try to pull out of the Warsaw Pact.¹⁹² On the other hand, the invasion dissipated any lingering chance that Romania would return to a meaningful role in the Pact. Ceaușescu was more determined than ever to pursue an independent military course. Romania not only continued eschewing joint military exercises but also refused to submit to the unified wartime command structure that Soviet officials devised for the alliance in the late 1970s and early 1980s.¹⁹³

Significant as these rifts *within* the Pact may have been, they were modest compared with the effects in other parts of the communist world. The invasion lent further impetus to the bitter Sino-Soviet confrontation, prompting the Chinese authorities not only to denounce the Soviet action, but also to reinforce their own military units along the Sino-Soviet border. The events of August 1968, and the outbreak of two serious rounds of armed clashes between Soviet and Chinese forces on the Ussuri and Amur Rivers in 1969, were cited by Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai in the latter half of 1969 when he declared the Soviet Union to be China's "main enemy." On that basis, Zhou and other Chinese leaders were soon willing to seek a rapprochement with the United States to present a common front against Soviet expansionism.¹⁹⁴ The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia was not the only factor that spurred this reorientation of Chinese policy, but it clearly had a far-reaching impact both in heightening diplomatic tensions and in stirring new fears among the Chinese leadership about Soviet military capabilities and intentions.

¹⁹² For earlier Soviet concerns about Romania's willingness to stay in the Pact, see "Rabochaya zapis' zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS ot 3 marta 1968," L. 92.

¹⁹³ Romania's defiance on this score was first revealed by Colonel Ryszard Kukliński in "Wojna z narodem widziana od środka," *Kultura* (Paris), 4/475 (April 1987), 52–55, esp. 53. Kukliński was a senior officer on the Polish General Staff who also was a spy for the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. He had to escape to the West in November 1981.

¹⁹⁴ Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, "China under Siege: Escaping the Dangers of 1968," in Carole Fink, Philipp Gassert, and Detlef Junker, eds., *1968: The World Transformed* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 193–217. See also Kenneth Lieberthal, "The Background in Chinese Politics," in Herbert J. Ellison, ed., *The Sino-Soviet Conflict: A Global Perspective* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982), 10–11.

Even more striking was the schism that the 1968 crisis helped produce in the international communist movement. The communist parties in Western Europe, especially in Italy and Spain, had watched Dubček's reform program with great sympathy and hope. The violent suppression of the Prague Spring aroused open and vehement opposition to the Soviet Union within these parties and stimulated the rise of what later became known as "Eurocommunism."¹⁹⁵ The defection of most of the major West European communist parties from the Soviet orbit was nearly as important in its long-term consequences as the earlier splits with Yugoslavia and China, and far more important than the break with Albania. The emergence of Eurocommunism mitigated potential Soviet influence in Western Europe and significantly altered the complexion of European politics. Moreover, the Eurocommunist alternative—an alternative that, unlike the Prague Spring, could not be subdued by Soviet tanks—became a potentially attractive, and thereby disruptive, element in Eastern Europe. The long-term costs of the invasion, in that respect, were considerable.

By contrast, the costs of the invasion vis-à-vis Western *governments* were only modest and transitory.¹⁹⁶ Although the political and economic benefits of détente with the United States had to be sacrificed for several months, Soviet officials accurately judged that almost all of those benefits could be salvaged without undue delay.¹⁹⁷ Indeed, U.S.-Soviet strategic nuclear arms control talks resumed after only the slightest interruption. Another way the invasion redounded to the Soviet Union's advantage was by reinforcing the West's implicit acceptance of a Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe. Much as the 1956 invasion of

¹⁹⁵ See Jiří Valenta, "Eurocommunism and Czechoslovakia," in Vernon V. Aspaturian *et al.*, eds., *Eurocommunism Between East and West* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1980), 157–180. The disillusionment was equally important among non-communist intellectuals, as discussed in Konrad Jarausch, "1968 and 1989: Caesuras, Comparisons, and Connections," in Fink, Gassert, and Junker, eds., 1968, 461–477.

¹⁹⁶ "Depeše No. 378 čs titulare z Washingtonu do Prahy z 21.8.1968," Cable (Secret) from Karel Duda, Czechoslovak ambassador in Washington, August 21, 1968, in ÚSD-SK, Arch. Komise, K—Archiv MZV, Dispatches Received, No. 7765/1968.

¹⁹⁷ Memorandum No. 2588-Ts (Top Secret) from S. Tsvigun, deputy chairman of the KGB, to the CPSU Politburo, November 15, 1968, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 311, Ll. 107–110.

Hungary had essentially ended talk of a Western-aided "rollback" of Communism and "liberation" of the East European countries, so the 1968 intervention in Czechoslovakia forced the United States and its allies to abandon even their far more cautious policies of "bridge-building."¹⁹⁸ In effect, U.S. officials concluded that any future "bridges" to Eastern Europe would have to go first through Moscow.

Similarly, the Czechoslovak invasion compelled West Germany to reorient its *Ostpolitik* in a way more palatable to the Soviet Union. Until 1968, the West German authorities had been reluctant to conclude any agreements that would imply formal recognition of the existing political configuration in Europe. Because the intervention in Czechoslovakia underscored Moscow's determination to prevent any change in the political and territorial status quo of Eastern Europe, the West German government recognized the necessity of acceding to this demand in its own policy toward the region.¹⁹⁹ From then on, leaders in Bonn emphasized East-West diplomatic "normalization" rather than territorial adjustments.²⁰⁰ The new brand of *Ostpolitik* was in gear even before the formation of Willy Brandt's Social Democratic government in 1969, but it gained momentum thereafter and rapidly achieved concrete results. The status quo in Europe was explicitly codified not only in the series of interstate agreements on Germany in the early 1970s, but also in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (the Helsinki Accords) in 1975.

Thus, in two respects, the Soviet Union's "rules of the game" in Eastern Europe, with a newly bolstered sphere of influence, gained further tacit acceptance from the West as a consequence of the 1968 invasion.

¹⁹⁸ For an overview of U.S. policy in the 1950s and 1960s, see Bennett Kovrig, *Of Walls and Bridges: The United States and Eastern Europe* (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 193–287.

¹⁹⁹ For further discussion of this point, see Sarotte, *Dealing with the Devil*; von Dannenberg, *The Foundations of Ostpolitik*; James H. Wolfe, "West Germany and Czechoslovakia: The Struggle for Reconciliation," *Orbis* 14, No. 1 (Spring 1970), 154–179, esp. 170–172; and Arnulf Baring, *Machtwechsel: Die Ära Brandt-Scheel* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1982), esp. 178–360.

²⁰⁰ See Brandt's notes for the FRG Cabinet meeting on June 7, 1970, in Willy-Brandt-Archiv im Archiv der sozialen Demokratie der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Bonn, Bundeskanzler und Bundesregierung 91, WBA, A 3/513.

The Brezhnev Doctrine

The new framework for Soviet–East European relations became even more explicit in the weeks following the invasion, when the Soviet Union proclaimed what became known in the West (though not in the USSR until 1989) as the “Brezhnev Doctrine.” One of the clearest Soviet statements of the rationale behind the doctrine actually came two months before the invasion, in a speech given by Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko to the Supreme Soviet. For the Soviet Union, Gromyko declared,

there is nothing more sacred in the field of foreign policy than the consolidation of the commonwealth of socialist countries. The defense of the gains and the cohesion of states belonging to the socialist commonwealth is our sacred duty, to which our country will be loyal despite all trials. . . . Those who hope to break even a single link in the socialist commonwealth are planning in vain. The socialist commonwealth will never permit this.²⁰¹

Gromyko’s sentiments were echoed by lengthy *Pravda* editorials on August 22 and September 26, which linked the fate of each socialist country with the fate of all others, stipulated that every socialist country must abide by the norms of Marxism-Leninism as interpreted in Moscow, and rejected “abstract sovereignty” in favor of the “laws of class struggle.”²⁰² The Brezhnev Doctrine thus laid out even stricter “rules of the game” than in the past for the socialist commonwealth:

Without question, the peoples of the socialist countries and the communist parties have and must have freedom to determine their country’s path of development. Any decision they make,

²⁰¹ “O mezhdunarodnom polozhenii i vneshnei politike Sovetskogo Soyuz: Doklad Ministra inostrannykh del SSSR deputata A. A. Gromyko,” *Pravda* (Moscow), June 28, 1968, 4.

²⁰² “Zashchita sotsializma—vysshii internatsional’nyi dolg,” *Pravda* (Moscow), August 22, 1968, 2–3; and S. Kovalev, “Suverenitet i internatsional’nye obyazannosti sotsialisticheskikh stran,” *Pravda* (Moscow), September 26, 1968, 4.

however, must not be inimical either to socialism in their own country or to the fundamental interests of the other socialist countries . . . A socialist state that is in a system of other states composing the socialist commonwealth cannot be free of the common interests of that commonwealth. The sovereignty of individual socialist countries cannot be set against the interests of world socialism and the world revolutionary movement. . . . Each communist party is free to apply the principles of Marxism-Leninism and socialism in its own country, but it is not free to deviate from these principles if it is to remain a communist party. . . . The weakening of any of the links in the world system of socialism directly affects all the socialist countries, and they cannot look indifferently upon this.²⁰³

Brezhnev himself reaffirmed the doctrine three months after the invasion in a speech before the Fifth Congress of the Polish United Workers' Party. While acknowledging that the intervention had been "an extraordinary step, dictated by necessity," he warned that "when internal and external forces hostile to socialism are threatening to turn a socialist country back to capitalism, this becomes a common problem and a concern of all socialist countries."²⁰⁴ In such circumstances, he declared, the USSR and its allies would have a duty to act. Subsequently, this theme was enshrined as a "basic principle" of relations among socialist states.

The enunciation of the Brezhnev Doctrine codified Soviet attitudes toward Eastern Europe as they had developed over the previous two decades. The doctrine owed as much to Josef Stalin and Nikita Khrushchev as to Brezhnev, inasmuch as the policies of these earlier leaders were merely reaffirmed in the Brezhnev era. Moreover, all the theoretical groundwork for the doctrine had already been laid prior to the invasion by Gromyko's speech, the Warsaw Letter, the Bratislava

²⁰³ Kovalev, "Suverenitet i internatsional'nye obyazannosti," 4.

²⁰⁴ "Rech' tovarishcha L. I. Brezhneva," *Pravda* (Moscow), November 13, 1968, 2. According to bracketed comments in the text, the delegates at the Congress greeted this and several other passages of the speech with enthusiastic applause.

Declaration, and numerous other Soviet statements.²⁰⁵ To that extent, the Brezhnev Doctrine added nothing genuinely new. Nevertheless, the promulgation of the doctrine was significant both in restoring a firmer tone to Soviet-East European relations and in defining the limits of permissible deviations from the Soviet model of communism. Among other things, the doctrine suggested that, in the future, Soviet military intervention would not necessarily be in response to a specific development—as it had been to the revolution in Hungary in 1956—but might also be *pre-emptive*, heading off undesired changes. Although a pre-emptive military option in Eastern Europe had always existed for the Soviet Union, the Brezhnev Doctrine made it explicit by suggesting that the Soviet government would never again risk “waiting until communists are being shot and hanged,” as in the autumn of 1956, before Soviet troops would be sent to “aid the champions of socialism.”²⁰⁶

The doctrine also confirmed that *internal* deviations from communism, even if unaccompanied by external realignments, might be sufficient to provoke a Soviet invasion. Dubček and other Czechoslovak officials had concluded from the experience with Hungary in 1956 that the most important thing was to ensure that sweeping internal changes were not perceived as endangering Czechoslovakia’s foreign orientation or its membership in the Warsaw Pact. The events of 1968 and the enunciation of the Brezhnev Doctrine made clear that East European *domestic* as well as foreign policies would have to conform with the “common natural laws of socialist development, deviation from which could lead to a deviation from socialism as such.”²⁰⁷ If the internal policies of a given communist party might “damage either socialism in its own country or the fundamental interests of the other socialist countries,” the Soviet Union would have not only a right but a “sacred duty” to intervene on behalf of the “socialist commonwealth.”²⁰⁸

²⁰⁵ For a cogent review of the genesis of the Brezhnev Doctrine, see Karen Dawisha, “The 1968 Invasion of Czechoslovakia: Causes, Consequences, and Lessons for the Future,” in Karen Dawisha and Philip Hanson, eds., *Soviet-East European Dilemmas: Coercion, Competition and Consent* (London: Heinemann, 1981), 9–25.

²⁰⁶ S. Kovalev, “O ‘mirnoi’ i nemirnoi kontrevolyutsii,” *Pravda* (Moscow), September 11, 1968, 4.

²⁰⁷ “Rech’ tovarishcha L. I. Brezhneva,” 2.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

In justifying such actions, the Brezhnev Doctrine imparted an explicitly ideological character to the Warsaw Pact. By its charter, the Warsaw alliance was originally “open to all states... irrespective of their social and political systems,” and the charter pledged its signatories to “refrain from violence or the threat of violence in their international relations” and to “abide by the principles of mutual respect for their independence and sovereignty, and of non-interference in their internal affairs.”²⁰⁹ The intervention of allied forces in Czechoslovakia raised obvious questions about these principles. In a secret report a few months after the invasion, the CPSU Politburo commission on Czechoslovakia acknowledged that “maintaining a line of non-interference” would be difficult because Soviet troops had committed “the most extreme act of interference there can possibly be in [Czechoslovakia’s] internal affairs.”²¹⁰ Far from expressing any regret about this development, the report emphasized that the Soviet Union must continue to “exert decisive interference in Czechoslovakia’s affairs and to apply pressure through every available channel.”²¹¹

For public consumption, however, Soviet officials had to come up with some way of claiming that the invasion was consistent with the principles laid out in the Warsaw Pact’s charter and in other binding international agreements. To that end, Soviet theorists began distinguishing between “bourgeois” and “class-based” versions of state sovereignty and independence. They argued that the intervention, far from overriding the principles of respect for sovereignty and non-interference, had actually buttressed them by “defending Czechoslovakia’s independence and sovereignty *as a socialist state*” against “the counter-revolutionary forces that would like to deprive it of this sovereignty.”²¹² The “bourgeois” concepts of independence and sovereignty, according to this argument, were invalid because they lacked “class content.”

²⁰⁹ “Dogovor o druzhbe, sotrudnichestve i vzaimnoi pomoshchi,” *Pravda* (Moscow), May 15, 1955, 2 (Articles 9, 1, and 8, respectively).

²¹⁰ “Nekotorye zamechaniya po voprosu podgotovki voenno-politicheskoi aktsii 21 avgusta 1968 g.,” Lf. 131–132.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² A. Sovetov, “Sovremennyi etap bor’by mezhdru sotsializmom i imperializmom,” *Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn’* (Moscow), no. 11 (November 1968), 7 (emphasis added).

By redefining the basic norms of international law within “the general context of class struggle,” and by elevating the collective interests of the “socialist commonwealth” over those of individual socialist states, the Brezhnev Doctrine in effect transformed the Warsaw Pact into a more formally ideological alliance than it had been in the past. This development further narrowed the prospects for individual alliance members to deviate from Soviet policy, a point emphasized by Ceaușescu in his protests over the invasion.²¹³

Epilogue: The Inception of “Normalization”

By the end of 1968, the Soviet Union had gone a long way toward consolidating the military and political gains of the invasion and toward overcoming most of the problems that had arisen. The conformity of the Warsaw Pact had been largely restored. Even so, the process of “normalization” in Czechoslovakia was far from over. Dubček was continuing to maneuver in a broadly reformist direction, despite the enormous pressure he was coming under from Moscow. It would take another four months before a new regime was formed in Prague under Gustáv Husák and nearly a year more of intensive “normalization” before the last remnants of the Prague Spring could be eradicated.²¹⁴ In the meantime, Soviet leaders again had to undertake various forms of intimidation and persuasion to try to ensure that Dubček would heed their wishes.

At a meeting with Dubček and other KSČ officials in Kyiv in early December, Soviet leaders emphasized their displeasure at the continued presence of reform-minded officials in the top party organs, the ČSSR security forces, and, above all, the Czechoslovak army.²¹⁵ Dubček acknowledged that “right-wing and even anti-socialist forces” were still active in Czechoslovakia, but he defended his latest policies, arguing that the KSČ had largely isolated the unsavory elements.

²¹³ “O pozitsii Rumynii v svyazi s sobyitiyami v Chekhoslovakii,” LI. 188–194.

²¹⁴ See Vladimir V. Kusin, *From Dubček to Charter 77: A Study of “Normalization” in Czechoslovakia 1968–1978* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1978), esp. 5–142.

²¹⁵ “Záznam z Československo-sovetského jednání v Kyjeve,” Stenographic Transcript (Top Secret), December 7–8, 1968, in ÚSD-SK, Z/S 17.

Brezhnev, Kosygin, and Podgornyi were far harsher in their assessments, and they demanded that Dubček move expeditiously to get rid of the “patently anti-Soviet . . . and irresponsible right-wingers” who were still acting in the name of the KSČ. Brezhnev and his colleagues also expressed dismay that the KSČ had still not reclaimed its “leading role” in Czechoslovak society, and they urged Dubček to “rebuff all these attacks” against the party.²¹⁶

Although Dubček remained in power until April 1969, the tone of the Kyiv meeting suggested that Soviet leaders had already concluded in early December that the situation would not fundamentally change unless they forced Dubček himself to leave the political scene. The KSČ First Secretary had moved a considerable distance away from his earlier policies in a bid to accommodate Soviet demands, but it was increasingly evident that Dubček, unlike some of his colleagues such as Gustáv Husák, was not willing to renounce the whole thrust of the Prague Spring. Earlier, when the basic problem was to gain credibility for the post-invasion regime in Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union benefited by restoring Dubček to his post; but by late 1968 and early 1969, this function had outlived its purpose. To the extent that Brezhnev and his colleagues were seeking a definitive return to orthodox communism and a full-scale purge of the KSČ, the Czechoslovak government, and the Czechoslovak army and security forces, they sensed that their objectives could be met only by getting rid of the man who had long symbolized the Prague Spring.

It would be left to Husák and Lubomír Štrougal—both of whom accompanied Dubček, Černík, and Svoboda to the Kyiv meeting—to extend “normalization” into its next, much harsher, phase. Joined by Bil’ak, Indra, and other members of the KSČ’s revived “healthy forces” (who had suddenly become the dominant forces), they plunged Czechoslovakia into a “Prague Winter” that lasted more than twenty years.

²¹⁶ Ibid., Ll. 518–530.

JEFFREY HERF

*1968 and the Terrorist Aftermath
in West Germany*

“1968,” like “1917” and “1945,” was one of the three key Hegelian moments in the history of twentieth-century Communism not only in Europe, but around the world.¹ That is, it was a moment in which parts of the international communist movement became convinced that the actual course of events was conforming to their understanding of a historical teleology pointing toward the fulfillment of revolutionary aspirations. The two previous Hegelian moments, the Bolshevik *coup d'état* of October 1917 and the Red Army's role in the defeat of Nazi Germany in May 1945, convinced the radical Left that history was progressing along the path predicted by Marxism-Leninism. The military uprising by the South Vietnamese National Liberation Front and the North Vietnamese army of January–February 1968, known as the Tet Offensive, had a similar world-historical significance for the adherents of revolutionary communism. Though it was a military disaster for the Vietnamese communists, this massive propaganda of the deed convinced the global radical Left in the Third World as well as in the United States, Japan and Western Europe that precisely the opposite was the case, namely that as in 1917 and 1945, revolutionary communism was succeeding in its efforts to defeat international, especially American, imperialism.

¹ On the notion of a Hegelian moment, see Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 162–200; and “Hegelianische Momente: Gewinner und Verlierer in der ostdeutschen Erinnerung an Krieg, Diktatur und Holocaust,” in Christoph Cornelißen, Lutz Klinkhammer, and Wolfgang Schwenker, eds., *Erinnerungskulturen: Deutschland, Italien und Japan seit 1945* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 2003), 198–209.

Before the Tet Offensive the anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist radical Left around the world had concluded that some form of socialism or communism in Europe and the United States was desirable. After Tet, a radical Left coalesced that believed armed revolution was also possible. Rage over the American war in Vietnam now merged with a new sense of American vulnerability. Around the world, a broad opposition to the American war in Vietnam had emerged in the preceding several years. For the radical Left in Western Europe and the United States, "1968" was an important turning point, because it began with the scent of victory in the air. After Tet, the pro-communist themes of the radical Left came more to the fore, and with them came rhetorical shifts from protest to resistance and to revolution. The vanguard role of the Vietnamese communists in 1968 recalled the prestige attributed to Lenin in 1917–1918 and the Soviet Union in 1945. Hence, without the Tet Offensive and the aura of victory surrounding it, there might not have been a massive student rebellion in Paris in May 1968 or the seizure of buildings at Columbia University, and the protests at the Mexico City Olympics in the summer. Some have made compelling arguments that the spirit of American and West European democratic Left and its cultural iconoclasm affected the events in Prague in 1968. Yet, on the whole, 1968 in Western Europe and around the world outside Eastern Europe did not stand for socialism with a human face. Nor did it advocate political pluralism or freedom of speech, and certainly not market economics. In this sense it amounted to an attack on political and economic liberalism from the left and sought to revive, not undermine, the dream of communist revolution.

To be sure, as those of us who were in the New Left in the 1960s recall, there were multiple meanings of "1968." Part of it was an anarchic, anti-authoritarian, and democratic spirit at odds with communist dictatorship. In West Germany, the student Left of the 1960s did give some impetus, though far less than is often claimed, to a sharper look at the crimes of the Nazi era. On both sides of the Atlantic, the revival of feminism was central to that year, as was the continuation of the civil rights movement. The assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King were a terrible blow to the cause of peaceful reform in the United States and fostered the radicalization of the New Left and the emerging Black Power movement. Nevertheless, probably a majority of those opposed to the war in Vietnam opted for a course

of political reform within the left wing of the Democratic Party. Yet, in 1968 and 1969 the minority vanguard within the New Left in Students for a Democratic Society, increasingly turned to varieties of Marxism-Leninism, most famously in the form of the Weatherman faction that turned to political violence.²

In West Germany, 1967 was as important a turning point in some ways as 1968, because it was then, in the aftermath of the Six-Day War between Israel and the Arab states, that the radical Left, along with the communist states of Eastern Europe, turned emphatically against Israel.³ Indeed, one distinctive quality of the West German radical Left after 1967 lay in the particularly important role it attributed to the conflict between Israel, the Arab states, and the Palestinians.⁴ Anti-Zionism and often Semitism were inseparable from the far Left in these years. The placement of a bomb by the West Berlin "Tupamaros" group in the Jewish Community Center in West Berlin in 1969 and the 1991 attempt by the RAF to blow up a bus in Budapest filled with Russian Jewish emigres on their way to the Budapest airport to fly to Israel are two anti-Semitic acts that were a starting point and an endpoint to the age of murder.

The "internationalism" of the New Left in West Germany did not foster a deeper examination of Nazi Germany's Final Solution of the Jewish Question in Europe. On the contrary, in its emerging partisanship for the Palestine Liberation Organization in its terrorist phase, much of the radical Left in West Germany, like the radical Left around the world, attacked the Jewish state as an ally and tool of American imperialism. Rather than help look more closely at the specific burdens of German history, the Marxism-Leninism of the radical Left in West Germany helped to lift the weight of national peculiarity from

² On Weatherman, see Peter Collier and David Horowitz, eds., *Destructive Generation: Second Thoughts about the 60s* (New York: Summit Books, 1989); and Jeremy Varon, *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, The Red Army Faction and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004).

³ See Martin Kloeke, *Israel und die deutsche Linke: Geschichte eines schwierigen Verhältnisses* (Frankfurt/Main: Haag and Herchen, 1990); and Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

⁴ On this, see Wolfgang Kraushaar, *Die Bombe im jüdischen Gemeindehaus* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2005).

its shoulders and to find comfort and moral righteousness in solidarity with the Third World and its fight against Zionism and imperialism. When historians, inside and outside West Germany, made important contributions to understanding the Holocaust, they often did so in opposition to the Marxist and Marxist-Leninist Zeitgeist of the West German 1960s and 1970s.⁵ In East Germany in the 1960s and 1970s, following the anti-cosmopolitan purges of the 1950s, Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy fostered an official marginalization of the history and memory of the Holocaust, as well as an intense ideological and practical support for the Arab states and the PLO.⁶

Most veterans of 1968 in West Germany pursued a non-violent aftermath in what Rudi Dutschke called the “long march through the institutions” in the professions and the universities. A minority, and an influential one, opted for terror and did so for over twenty years.⁷ The leading terrorist organization in the Federal Republic of Germany, the Red Army Faction (*Rote Armee Fraktion*) or RAF, murdered thirty-four people between 1971 and 1993. Its members would have killed more had they not been arrested by police and intelligence agencies or killed in the course of armed confrontations with the authorities. West German left-wing terrorism became most well-known in the “German Fall” of 1977. Yet, the path to terrorist violence began in summer 1969 and did not end until 1992. The RAF did not dissolve until 1998. Its purpose was to destroy both capitalism and liberal democracy in the Federal Republic in the hopes of giving support to what it hoped would be a global communist revolution. In those twenty-eight years, more than a thousand police and government officials worked to capture members of the Red Army Faction. The files of the resulting government investigators and trial transcripts encompassed eleven million pages.⁸

⁵ See, for example, Karl Bracher, *Zeitgeschichtliche Kontroversen: Um Faschismus, Totalitarismus, Demokratie* (Munich: Piper, 1984); and Nicolas Berg, *Der Holocaust und die westdeutschen Historiker: Erforschung und Erinnerung* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2003).

⁶ I have explored this in more depth in Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

⁷ In so doing, I am drawing on Jeffrey Herf, “An Age of Murder: Ideology and Terror in Germany,” *Telos*, no. 144 (Fall 2008), 8–39.

⁸ Butz Peters, *Tödlicher Irrtum: Die Geschichte der RAF* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 2007), 17.

The RAF is generally viewed as a chapter in the history of modern terrorism, and that it certainly was. But it was also a chapter in the history of two major European and German political traditions: communism and anti-Semitism. To be sure, most communists did not engage in politically inspired murder, but the terrorism that emerged in West Germany in 1969 had its ideological roots in the communist tradition and is incomprehensible without taking it into consideration. These links were practical as well as ideological. We know that the East German government and the Palestinian Liberation Organization gave the RAF money, weapons, fake travel documents, training, travel funds, and escape routes.⁹ The Marxist-Leninist analysis of fascism that was central to the RAF and which it shared with a much broader post-1968 political subculture helps to understand why the post-New Left sects in Germany, Italy, and Japan were so much more murderous than in the United States, France, and Britain. If fascism was a byproduct of capitalism, as the Marxist-Leninist interpretation insisted, then the reproduction of capitalism in all three societies—and the continuity of parts of the elites in power before 1945—also reproduced the conditions that could give rise to fascism again. Not surprisingly, the terrorist groups in Italy, Japan, and West Germany denounced the postwar democracies as “fascist” or “neo-fascist” governments.¹⁰

⁹ Richard Herzinger, “Deutsch-palästinensische Achse des Terrors,” *Die Welt am Sonntag, Dossier* (September 2, 2007), 17. Also see Martin Jander’s research in the Stasi files indicate that the RAF had multiple contacts and forms of assistance from the East German intelligence services. See Martin Jander, “Differenzen im antiimperialistischen Kampf: Zu den Verbindungen des Ministeriums für Staatssicherheit mit der RAF und dem bundesdeutschen Linksterrorismus,” in Wolfgang Kraushaar, ed., *Die RAF und der Linke Terrorismus, Bd. I* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2006), 696–713.

¹⁰ For analysis of these comparisons, see Dorothea Hauser, “Deutschland, Italien, Japan: Die ehemaligen Achsenmächte und der Terrorismus der 1970er Jahre,” in Wolfgang Kraushaar, ed., *Die RAF und der linke Terrorismus, Bd. 2* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2006), 1272–98; and Jeremy Varon, *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004). On the centrality of anti-fascism in the history of twentieth-century communism, see Francois Furet, *The Passing of an Illusion: The Communist Idea in the Twentieth Century*, trans. Debra Furet (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

The death toll of thirty-four victims could have been much higher. We do not know about all of the attempted murders that the German police and intelligence services were able to prevent. Several notable events are public knowledge. They include the placement by the "June 2nd Movement" of a bomb that failed to explode in the Jewish Community Center in Berlin in 1970. On August 25, 1977, RAF members planned to launch forty-two projectiles filled with 150 kilograms of explosives at the offices of the Bundesanwaltschaft (Federal Prosecutors Office) in Karlsruhe. The device was discovered and disarmed. The RAF participated in the hijacking of an Air France plane to Entebbe in 1976, and a Lufthansa flight to Mogadishu in 1977. The Entebbe hijacking was distinctive because the terrorists, including Wilfried Bose, product of the left-wing scene in Frankfurt/Main, separated Jews from non-Jews (not only Israelis and non-Israelis) at the Entebbe airport. Only armed intervention by Israeli commandos in Entebbe and German forces in Mogadishu saved the lives of the hostages, with the exception of the German pilot in Mogadishu and an ill, elderly Jewish passenger in Entebbe. The toll of those murdered could have gone well into the hundreds.

Especially in the 1970s, the RAF could count on sympathizers who either justified its actions or muted criticism of them. The attack on Western democracy as a sham, as capitalism as an unjust and irrational system, and on anti-communism as an illegitimate and immoral component of the Cold War helped place Western democracy on the intellectual defensive and helped mute criticism of the existing communist states in the Soviet empire. In September 1967, Rudi Dutschke and Hans-Jürgen Krahel, two leaders of the West German SDS (*Sozialistische Deutschen Studentenbund*), wrote a much-discussed "Essay on Organization." It was presented to an SDS meeting in Frankfurt/Main in 1967 and was passed by majority vote. Speaking under the flag of the Vietcong, or the National Liberation Front in South Vietnam, they argued that "the propaganda of bullets in the 'third world' must be complemented by a propaganda of the deed in the metropolises. It is there that an urbanization of rural guerrilla activity is historically possible."¹¹ Writing with a sound grasp of Marxist theory, Dutschke

¹¹ Rudi Dutschke and Hans Jürgen Krahel, "Organisationsreferat," *Diskus-Frankfurter Studentenzeitung*, 30 Jg., Nr. ½ (February 1980), 6–9, cited by Wolfgang Kraushaar, "Rudi Dutschke und der bewaffnete Kampf,"

and Krahle lent intellectual legitimacy to political violence several years before the idea became the RAF's practice.

By 1969, the New Left was making headlines for its disruptions of the German university lectures and exams. Theodor Adorno found himself at the center of these disputes. In a letter of June 19, 1969, to Herbert Marcuse, Adorno spoke of his depression over the fact that leftist radicals had broken up his lectures twice that summer semester and that he had to call the police to restore order to the Institute for Social Research building. He complained that the radical Left was preventing others from speaking and attacking professors. "The danger that the student movement will turn toward fascism is one I take more seriously than you do. After people here in Frankfurt screamed at the Israeli Ambassador, I'm no longer convinced of the assurance that this has nothing to do with anti-Semitism. ... You must once look into the manic, cold eyes of those who even when appealing to us [Fr. School] turn their rage against us."¹² Adorno was not reassured by Marcuse's rejection of the possibility that the student Left might revert to fascist methods. In a statement of July 17, 1969, he described the efforts of radical students to break up end-of-the-semester sociology exams in the course of which one young man physically struck the sixty-six-year-old professor.¹³

Kraushaar makes a compelling argument that the RAF did not have its origins on the periphery of the radical Left. Rather, its key ideas came from well within it. He draws attention to what he calls "the badly neglected" ideas and activities of one Dieter Kunzelmann, the first of West German radicals to take the idea of urban guerrillas seriously when he founded the Tupamaros West Berlin in the fall of 1969. The noun "Tupamaros" came from the name of a terrorist group in Uruguay composed of students inspired by the Brazilian legislator and communist Carlos Marighella. In spring 1969, Marighella published *The Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla*. It was quickly trans-

in Wolfgang Kraushaar, Karin Wieland, and Jan Phillip Reemtsma, *Rudi Dutschke, Andreas Baader und die RAF* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2005), 20–21. On Dutschke and political violence, also see Michaela Karl, *Rudi Dutschke. Revolutionär ohne Revolution* (Frankfurt/Main, 2003).

¹² Theodor Adorno to Herbert Marcuse, June 19, 1969, Kraushaar, *Frankfurter Schule und Studentenbewegung*, 651–652.

¹³ Theodor W. Adorno, "Am 14. Juli sollten die Vordiplom-Klausuren..."

lated into many languages by left-wing presses and became a bible for terrorists around the world. In 1971, Rowholt, the German publisher of a series of left-wing paperbacks, published *Handbuch der Stadtguerilla*. The idea of the urban guerrilla and the attack on Israel and on West German Jews became radical left-wing practice on November 9 (the anniversary of *Kristallnacht*), 1969. On that day, the unexploded bomb was found in the Jewish Community Center in Berlin. Four days later, “Shalom and Napalm,” one of the most infamous yet defining statements of the then-emerging terror scene, was published in *Agit 883*, a magazine of the radical Left in West Berlin.¹⁴ The authors wrote that “the victorious end of the war in Vietnam” will mean “the beginning of Vietnam wars on all fronts.” Their focus was on the Middle East. There European and American capital supported “the Zionists in their aggressive military operations” in the Arab world. West German restitution payments (*Wiedergutmachung*) and development aid contributed to the Zionist defense budget. “Under the guilt-laden pretext of coming to terms with the fascist atrocities against the Jews, they (West German government and industry) make a decisive contribution to Israel’s fascist atrocities against Palestinian Arabs.”¹⁵ The leaflet dismissed West German reflections on the murder of Europe’s Jews as a form of neurosis that failed to question the legitimacy of the state of Israel. Conversely, “true anti-fascism” was “the clear and simple expression of solidarity with the fighting fedayeen.” It was necessary to

mercilessly fight against the close intertwining of Zionist Israel with the fascist Federal Republic of Germany. Every hour of memory in West Berlin and in the FRG suppress the fact that *Kristallnacht* of 1938 is today repeated every day by the Zionists in the occupied territories, in the refugee camps and in Israeli prisons. The Jews who were expelled by fascism have themselves become fascists who, in collaboration with American capital,

¹⁴ “Schalom + Napalm,” November 13, 1969, 1. Jg. Nr. 40, 9, cited by Wolfgang Kraushaar, *Die Bombe im jüdischen Gemeindehaus*, 46. Translated and reprinted in Bommi Baumann, *Wie Alles Anfang: How It All Began; The Personal Account of a West German Urban Guerrilla*, trans. Helene Ellenbogen and Wayne Parker (Vancouver: Pulp Press, 1977), 57–58.

¹⁵ “Schalom + Napalm,” Wolfgang Kraushaar, *Die Bombe im jüdischen Gemeindehaus*, 46–48.

want to eradicate the Palestinian people. By striking the direct support for Israel by German industry and the government of the Federal Republic, we are aiding the victory of the Palestinian revolution and force for the renewed defeat of world imperialism. At the same time, we expand our battle against the fascists in democratic clothes and begin to build a revolutionary liberation front in the metropole. BRING THE BATTLE FROM THE VILLAGES INTO THE CITIES! ALL POLITICAL POWER COMES FROM THE BARREL OF A GUN.

Signed, Black Rats, *TW* [for Tupamoros, West Berlin]¹⁶

The leaflet captured the essence of the emerging radical leftist hatred of Israel and willingness to attack Jews in West Germany. It presented efforts to focus on the Nazi past and the fate of the Jews as due to a neurotic guilt complex that stood in the way of psychic health and clear thinking, and depicted the Israelis as the new Nazis and the Palestinians as anti-fascist heroes. This line of reasoning opened the way for West German radicals to attack Israelis and Jews with a clear conscience. Kraushaar and others have rightly drawn attention to the unburdening effect of such reasoning to account for their particular appeal to the West German Left. He describes it as the kind of “defensive anti-Semitism” that Theodor Adorno found prevalent in West German society in the 1950s. It was a mentality which reversed the actual relation of perpetrator and victim, and led West Germans to present themselves as victims, deny well-known facts, and express anger at the damage done to the collective narcissism rather than display the much-discussed sense of guilt. The result was a revival of angry and aggressive feelings toward the Jews. Kraushaar views the statements of the West Berlin Tupamaros, Kunzelmann’s reference to coming to terms with the Nazi past as the *Judenknax*, and the aggressiveness of the New Left and its offshoots towards Israel as a leftist variant of the defensive anti-Semitism Adorno had observed fifteen years earlier. As noted above, antagonism towards Israel had been the norm in East Germany for twenty years before Kunzelmann and the West Berlin Tupamaros emerged. Indeed, it had been a routine of communist propaganda in the Soviet bloc as a whole even before 1967. In 1969, it was finding an

¹⁶ Ibid., 48.

echo in the West. The New Left was famous for its rejection of communism Soviet-style, yet here was an example of the communists' arguments resurfacing in Western Europe.

In April 1971, the RAF issued a manifesto written by Ulrike Meinhof titled "On the Armed Struggle in Western Europe" (*Über den bewaffneten Kampf in Westeuropa*).¹⁷ Its forty-eight footnotes offered evidence of the RAF's immersion in the communist tradition.¹⁸ Meinhof drew inspiration from the Paris Commune, the October "Revolution" of 1917 and the "peoples' war" in China. These events made clear that "armed struggle" was "a central problem of revolutionary theory" and was in fact the "highest form of class struggle."¹⁹ In light of the fact that many commentators have suggested that West German terrorism was an effort to overcome shortcomings regarding the Nazi past, it is important to note that in this statement the RAF authors placed German history into a trans-national narrative of capitalism and international imperialism. In her words, "Auschwitz, Setif, Vietnam, Indonesia, Amman" demonstrated that "massacre does not belong to the past of systems of domination that have been overcome but instead now, as before, belongs to the instruments of the dominant [rulers]."²⁰ Far from addressing the distinctive features of the Holocaust, the RAF—fifteen years before the famous *Historikerstreit*—denied its uniqueness and compared it to a variety of recent conflicts stemming from anti-colonial or communist insurgencies. Meinhof quoted Marx and Engels, Lenin, and Mao and asserted that the "revolutionary struggle of the proletariat against domination of capital reaches its decisive, highest stage in armed civil war."²¹ In this sense, the RAF was a repetition of the left-wing communism of the Weimar Republic. Just as the communists of the Weimar era attacked German Social Democrats as "social fascists," so the RAF emerged in the early years of the most left-

¹⁷ "Das Konzept Stadtguerilla, April 1971,"; "Über den bewaffneten Kampf in Westeuropa, Mai 1971," in *RAF: Rote Armee Fraktion: Texte und Materialien zur Geschichte der RAF* (West Berlin: ID-Verlag, 1977), 49–111.

¹⁸ "Über den bewaffneten Kampf in Westeuropa, Mai 1971," in *Rote Armee Fraktion: Texte und Materialien zur Geschichte der RAF* (Berlin: ID Verlag, 1977), 49–111.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 50.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, 51.

leaning, democratic government in West Germany since Social Democratic Chancellor Herman Muller's coalition was toppled in 1930.

As one steeped in the debates of the communist movement, Meinhof evoked a Lenin who was an advocate of terror. Three decades before major studies by Richard Pipes, Orlando Figes, and Nicholas Werth on terror in the Lenin era were published, the RAF authors drew on the letter and spirit of the public and well-known Lenin to underscore his own support for terror.²² They wrote that "Lenin would be horrified" by use of quotes from his own works to suggest he opposed use of terror, and then cited two of his early writings on the subject.²³ The first were his notes for the Second Party Conference of the Russian Social Democratic Party of 1905, in which he insisted that "terror must in fact merge with the mass movement,"²⁴ and second, his 1906 essay "On Partisan War" in which he wrote, "Armed struggle has two different goals which must be kept separate from one another. The goal of this battle first of all is killing individual persons... subalterns in the police and army, and second, theft of money from the government and private persons."²⁵ Meinhof and her comrades concluded that "Lenin had especially advocated the first goal of armed struggle, that is, the liquidation of individual functionaries of the apparatus of oppression."²⁶ In view of their repeated and emphatic evocation of their communist convictions, the RAF deserves to be included in the history of twentieth-century communism. It should not be considered only in the separate category called the history of terrorism.

In November 1972, Palestinian terrorists kidnapped Israeli Olympic athletes at the Munich Olympics. In the midst of efforts to free the hostages, the kidnappers instead murdered their hostages. Following the murders, Meinhof wrote, and the RAF issued, "The Action of Black September in Munich: On the Strategy of Anti-Imperialist Struggle" (*Die Aktion des Schwarzen September in München. Zur Strat-*

²² See Richard Pipes, *The Unknown Lenin*; Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*; Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy*; and Nicholas Werth, in *The Black Book of Communism*.

²³ "Über den bewaffneten Kampf in Westeuropa, Mai 1971," 78–79.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 80.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 81.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

egie des Antiimperialistischen Kampfes).²⁷ In this remarkable text, she again made clear how crucial anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism would be for understanding the history of the RAF. Far from condemning the murders of the Israeli athletes, she celebrated the deed. "The action of Black September in Munich... was simultaneously anti-imperialist, anti-fascist and internationalist..." What she called the Munich "action" drew attention to "Israel's Nazi fascism" and served as an example of "how practice pushes theory forward."²⁸ "Just as the essence of imperialism is fascist, so anti-fascism is in its tendency anti-imperialist." Ergo, the attack on the Israeli athletes was anti-imperialist and hence anti-fascist. Meinhof stressed that the RAF was thus part of this global anti-fascist, anti-imperialist, communist revolution.

She also expressed hatred for West Germany's only recently elected Social Democratic government. Its chancellor, Willy Brandt, would have been surprised to learn that since he and the Social Democrats entered the Bonn government in 1966, more "democracy had been abolished in the Federal Republic than was the case in the seventeen years before under all CDU [conservative Christian Democratic Union] governments taken together."²⁹ The Social Liberal coalition had created a "*schmeckhafte Imperialismus*," a "tasteful or palatable imperialism."³⁰ The goal of the West German government was "not to be in any way inferior to the Moshe Dayan fascism—Dayan, this Himmler of Israel."³¹ She found the terrorists blameless for the athletes' deaths and concluded that "the action of Black September in Munich will not be extinguished from the memory of anti-imperialist struggle. Solidarity with the liberation struggle of the Palestinian people! Solidarity with the revolution in Vietnam! Revolutionaries of all lands, unite!"³² Meinhof and her comrades merit a place in histories

²⁷ "Die Aktion des Schwarzen September in München. Zur Strategie des Antiimperialistischen Kampfes," *Rote Armee Fraktion: Texte und Materialien...* 151–177.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 159.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 171.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 172.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 173.

³² *Ibid.*, 177. Note again that the essay rejected that notion that there was anything at all unique about the Holocaust. In the Federal Republic, efforts to dissolve the uniqueness of the Holocaust did not begin with Ernst Nolte and the conservative historians of the 1980s. As far as I recall and have read,

of European and German anti-Semitism. As a strategic document, her text also made clear that the RAF was going to do all it could to make the Federal Republic pay as high a price as possible for its support for Israel. Far from coming to terms with the Nazi past, the RAF—like East Germany—took aim at West German forms of coming to terms with the crimes of the Nazi past (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*), most of all its diplomatic, military, and economic relations with Israel.

Conclusion

The left-wing radicalism of 1968 did not lead only to the terrorist acts of the following years. The feminist, environmentalist, and gay-liberation movements of the 1970s also drew on 1968's rebellious spirit. There is a case to be made that some of the ideas of 1968 in the West reinforced a rebellious spirit in the Soviet bloc. Once shorn of its Marxist trappings, the mood of 1968 did foster a willingness among some veterans of the sixties to look at the specific dimensions of anti-Semitism in German history and also to challenge Germany's ethnically rooted and archaic conceptions of citizenship.³³ Some voices of moral clarity, integrity, and serious self-scrutiny, such as that of the German novelist and essayist Peter Schneider, emerged from this crucible.³⁴ These welcome elements of the aftermath of 1968 were also part of its history. In the fall of 1977, Rudi Dutschke distanced himself from terror when he wrote in *Die Zeit* that "we know only too well what the despotism of capital is. We do not want to replace it with a despotism of terror." Herbert Marcuse also wrote in *Die Zeit* that murder must not be a political weapon.³⁵ These reflections, coming

the RAF's comparisons did not meet with anywhere near this level of indignation. On the contrary, they entered into and reflected the moods of the radical Left.

³³ On the citizenship debates, see Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Thomas Schmid, *Heimat Babylon: Das Wegnis der Multikulturellen Demokratie* (Hamburg: Hoffmann and Campe, 1992).

³⁴ For his deeply intelligent, insightful, and honest memoir, see Peter Schneider, *Rebellion und Wahn: Mein '68: Eine Autobiographische Erzählung* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer and Witsche, 2008).

³⁵ Rudi Dutschke, "Kritik am Terror muß klarer werden," *Die Zeit*, October 1977. Also see Rudi Dutschke, "On Terrorism," translated by Jeffrey Herf

from Dutschke and Marcuse, helped to stimulate an impressive and important rethinking and deradicalization of the West German Left, which entailed an effort to juxtapose a humane and civil legacy of 1968 to that of the terrorists. The previous year, one of Adorno's students, the social theorist Detlev Claussen, had clearly and unequivocally denounced Wilfried Bose's anti-Semitic "selection" of Jews and non-Jews in Entebbe in an essay entitled "Terror in the Air, Counter-Revolution on the Ground."³⁶ It was this, in many ways impressive and historically distinctive, de-radicalizing, self-reflective, and genuinely democratic Left that formed the Green Party and accepted the rules of the game of liberal democracy. Just as the emergence of the Red Army Faction was a chapter in the history of communism, so its demise was partly due to this history of de-radicalization of the West German Left, as well as to the collapse of the communist states in Europe in 1989–1990.³⁷ One of the sources of this process of de-radicalization was extended examination of the connections between the utopias and illusions of 1968 and the years of terror that followed.

Yet for all that, the years of terror and murder cannot be hermetically sealed off from either the theory or the practice of the New Left in 1968.³⁸ The terrorists benefited from a broader mood in and around the West German universities, which frowned on sharp, unambiguous criticism of the communist dictatorships of Eastern Europe. To speak of human rights in the Soviet bloc in those years in West Germany was

in *New German Critique*, no. 12, 1977. Also available at <http://www.trend.infopartisan.net/trd0407/t060407.html>. The German reads: "Wir wissen nur zu gut, was die Despotie des Kapitals ist, wir wollen sie nicht ersetzen durch Terrordespotie." Also see Herbert Marcuse, "Murder Must Not Be a Political Weapon," in the same issue of *New German Critique*.

³⁶ Detlev Claussen, "Terror in der Luft. Konterrevolution auf der Erde," in *Links. Sozialistische Zeitung* no. 80, September 1976, 6 ff. Also see Detlev Claussen, *Vom Jüdenhaß zum Antisemitismus. Materialien einer verleugneten Geschichte*. (Neuwied: Darmstadt, 1987).

³⁷ On the concept of deradicalization, see Jerry Z. Muller, *The Other God that Failed: Hans Freyer and the Deradicalization of German Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

³⁸ On the communist idea in the twentieth century, see Furet, *The Passing of an Illusion*. The German edition received the Hannah Arendt Prize in Germany, and one of the members of the jury was Daniel Cohn-Bendit, a leader of the May revolt in 1968 in Paris and later active member of the Green Party in Germany.

to be branded with the sin of anti-communism, at a time when some blurred into insignificance the distinctions between the Nazi attack on Jewish Bolshevism and NATO's efforts to contain the Soviet Union. A gap emerged in Europe between the radical Left, focused on the ills of capitalism, and East European dissidents eager to enjoy the "bourgeois" liberties that were under attack by the radical Left in the West. Perhaps one unintended consequence of the years of terror in the Federal Republic was to remind the West German political establishment of the dangers of the fusion of the traditions of communism and anti-Semitism that exploded in the RAF's murderous actions. If their actions contributed to stiffening the spine of the West German and West European establishment in the 1970s and 1980s, the RAF terrorists may have made an unintended contribution to the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe following Moscow's setbacks in the second Cold War in the 1980s.

VICTOR ZASLAVSKY

The Prague Spring

Resistance and Surrender of the PCI

The Prague Spring represented a multilevel conflict between conservative and reformist groups that exploded simultaneously within both the Soviet bloc and the international communist movement. Newly available documentation from the Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (hereafter referred to by the Russian acronym RGANI) as well as the archive of the Gramsci Institute (Rome) makes it possible to analyze the conflict between the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and the Italian Communist Party (PCI) over the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia by the armed forces of five Warsaw Pact members, a conflict that subsequently led to the emergence of the Eurocommunist movement.

Economic reforms introduced by the Brezhnev-Kosygin leadership after the ousting of Khrushchev at the end of 1964 moved the Soviet Union towards a moderate economic liberalization. Unexpectedly for the Soviet leadership, these reforms gave a powerful impetus to a reformist movement in the countries of Eastern Europe that overstepped the narrow boundaries of economics and touched the systemic core of their political regimes. By 1968, Czechoslovakia became the epicenter of a reformist movement directed at liberalizing and democratizing the “popular democracies” of Eastern Europe, to the extent of weakening or even abolishing such central institutions as the party *nomenklatura* and all-pervasive censorship. According to their declarations, Czechoslovak reformers aimed at transforming Soviet-type socialism into “socialism with a human face.”

As the largest West European communist party closely tied to the repressive Soviet regime, the PCI found itself under constant pressure after Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalin’s crimes at the Twen-

tieth Congress of the CPSU and the 1956 Soviet invasion of Hungary. The reformist course of the Czechoslovak Communist Party under Alexander Dubček's leadership offered the PCI a new option to improve its public image and expand its influence. The leaders of the PCI enthusiastically supported the Czechoslovak reforms. In March 1968, PCI Secretary Luigi Longo published an article affirming that the Czechoslovak experience not only provided "an important contribution to the struggle of the working class and the Left forces in the capitalist world," but also furnished a model of reform for all the "existing socialist" regimes.¹ In May 1968, Longo visited Czechoslovakia. His visit was conceived as "an open manifestation of solidarity of Italian communists with the new leadership of the Czechoslovak Communist Party [KSČ]."² Upon his return to Rome, Longo informed his colleagues in the PCI Executive that there were "no doubts about the socialist character of Czechoslovakia and its friendly relations with the USSR," even as "the working class was somewhat perplexed" by the new orientation of the KSČ leadership.³ At the same time, Enrico Berlinguer, Longo's future successor, visited Hungary to probe the seriousness of Soviet threats to the Prague reformist course. Both Italian communist leaders returned convinced that there was "no cause for alarm" and that "the Czech comrades were quite satisfied with the Italian communist support of their reformist policies."⁴

In fact, Soviet internal documents indicate that Italian communist leaders thoroughly misconstrued Moscow's reaction to the Czechoslovak events. The Soviet leadership's apprehension about the Czech situation was augmented by pressure from such East European leaders as Władysław Gomułka of Poland, János Kádár of Hungary, and Todor Zhivkov of Bulgaria. On March 21, 1968, Brezhnev informed the Politburo that these leaders had appealed to him to "take measures for the normalization of the situation in Czechoslovakia, even if they did not specify which measures they had in mind."⁵

¹ L. Longo, "E' ora di cambiare," *L'Unità*, March 28, 1968.

² A. Höbel, "Il Pci, il '68 cecoslovacco e il rapporto col PCUS," *Studi Storici*, no. 4, 2001, 1147.

³ Istituto Gramsci (thereafter IG), Archivio del Partito Comunista (thereafter Apc), Direzione, May 10, 1968, mf. 020, p. 640 ss.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ R. Pichoja, *Sovetskij Sojuz: Istorija vlasti, 1945–1991* (Moscow: Rags, 1998), 310.

Towards the end of June, when several leading Czechoslovak reformers published their manifesto "Two Thousand Words," the Soviet Politburo became truly alarmed. During a two-day Politburo meeting of July 2 and 3—the length of the meeting itself indicative of the gravity of the situation—Brezhnev relayed to the Soviet leadership the position of Kádár, who «insisted that the occupation of Czechoslovakia was now inevitable.”⁶ At the same meeting, Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko concurred by declaring that “it is now quite clear we cannot avoid an armed intervention.”⁷

To prepare the international communist movement for this eventuality, on July 9, 1968, the Politburo circulated a letter among “Soviet ambassadors or KGB residents” in forty capitalist countries. The recipients were instructed “to meet immediately with the leaders of local communist parties” and inform them orally about the Soviet perception of Czechoslovak events.⁸ The letter began with the statement: “Taking into account that the turn of events is becoming increasingly dangerous for the socialist cause and that for obvious reasons we cannot make public all the information at our disposal, we are obliged confidentially to communicate the following information.” The Politburo letter continued with a Marxist class analysis of the peculiarities of both the KSČ, whose membership included “many former social democrats,” and of Czechoslovakia as a country, in which “the enemies of socialism maintained their presence” because the Czech bourgeoisie “... did not emigrate from the country after the victory of the socialist revolution and had not abandoned hope of a capitalist restoration.”⁹ According to the Politburo, an anti-socialist political opposition had emerged in Czechoslovakia that rejected Marxism-Leninism and eulogized bourgeois democracy and such bourgeois figures as Tomáš Masaryk and Edvard Beneš. Moscow leaders perceived as particularly dangerous the fact that anti-socialist elements had learned from the failed 1956 Hungarian “counter-revolution” to hide behind democratic slogans and prepare for a “peaceful overthrow of the socialist order.”¹⁰ This acknowledgement of the peaceful character of the Czech reform-

⁶ Ibid., 323.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ RGANI, f. 3, op. 72, d. 184, 2–8.

⁹ Ibid., 2.

¹⁰ Ibid., 6.

ers did not prevent the Politburo letter from affirming that “the anti-socialist forces threaten us by claiming that if we do not ‘peacefully’ relinquish power, they will resort to all possible means, including taking up arms.”¹¹ The Politburo letter to the leaders of the international communist movement concluded with a dramatic statement: “In this dangerous situation of a direct threat to socialist achievements, when the forces of reaction are ready to hang communists from telegraph posts, we cannot limit ourselves to ideological-political methods... We cannot accept the loss of such a key element of the socialist system as socialist Czechoslovakia.”¹² This categorical assertion was meant to warn the foreign communist parties that a military invasion of Czechoslovakia was highly probable or even inevitable. It is difficult to imagine, however, how the Soviet ambassadors or KGB residents could have transmitted orally all of the key points of such a long document. In fact, the PCI archives do not contain any reference to the Moscow letter of July 9 or to Longo’s response. It is possible that the Soviet ambassador’s presentation did not sufficiently impress the Italian leader, who did not appreciate the threat of a coming military intervention.

On the other hand, the subsequent letter from five members of the Warsaw Pact, dated July 14, 1968, inviting the KSČ leadership to travel to Warsaw immediately, was correctly perceived by the PCI leadership as a “menacing warning” to the new leaders of the KSČ.¹³ The PCI leadership reacted by publishing its own appraisal of the Czech situation in which it expressed its solidarity with the KSČ but tried to paper over the disagreement with the Warsaw Pact countries.¹⁴ In his speech to the PCI Executive, Longo tried to maintain a difficult balance: he expressed support for Czech reformers but accepted the legitimacy of Moscow’s preoccupations and promised to fight against “anti-socialist tendencies in Czechoslovakia.” Longo envisioned two possible catastrophes: Czechoslovakia’s exit from the socialist camp with the subsequent restoration of the capitalist system and, alternatively, the suppression of reforms in Czechoslovakia by the armed forces of the

¹¹ Ibid., 5.

¹² Ibid., 7–8.

¹³ Gian Carlo Pajetta, *Le crisi che ho vissuto: Budapest, Praga, Varsavia* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1982), 123–127.

¹⁴ *Documenti dall’XI al XII Congresso* (Rome: Visigalli-Pasetti Arti Grafiche, 1969), 491–494.

Warsaw Pact. Longo maintained that by actively promoting the policy of compromise and mediation, the PCI would contribute to averting either disaster.¹⁵

The only practical step taken by the PCI, however, was to support the efforts by the French communists to organize a conference of the European communist parties dedicated to the Czechoslovak situation. This Italian–French initiative was met with hostility by the Soviet leadership, which in a letter of July 19, 1968, expressed “extreme surprise” that such a conference could be called for without “prior coordination with the leadership of the other communist parties involved.”¹⁶ The Soviet Politburo went on to inform the PCI and the French Communist Party (hereafter PCF) that the CPSU and the communist parties of the socialist countries would refuse to participate in the proposed conference, since the absence of reliable information about the situation in Czechoslovakia would lead to a possible exacerbation of the differences in the communist movement at a moment when a demonstration of unity was of crucial importance.¹⁷ In a second, even tougher telegram to the PCF leader Rochet, Moscow warned that if the PCF continued to propose such an international conference, the CPSU would have no choice but to “publicly express its opposition to it.”¹⁸

Having received the letter of July 19, Longo told the Soviet ambassador that a military intervention would mean “a real disaster and not only for Czechoslovakia.”¹⁹ During the urgently convened meeting of the PCI Executive, Enrico Berlinguer expressed a clear understanding of the situation. He proposed that the PCI issue an official statement repeating what Longo had privately conveyed to the Soviet ambassador, namely that “conditions that would justify the Soviet intervention do not exist.” Berlinguer further noted that his intuition suggested the Warsaw Pact countries were planning an armed intervention.²⁰ During the subsequent meeting of the PCI Executive on July 26, Berlinguer proposed answering Moscow’s insistent questions concerning the

¹⁵ IG, Apc, Direzione, July 17, 1968, mf. 020/ 798 e ss.

¹⁶ RGANI, f. 3, op. 72, d. 188, 27, 92–94.

¹⁷ RGANI, f. 3, op. 72, d. 188, 7, 98–101.

¹⁸ RGANI, f. 3, op. 72, d. 188, 5, 14 ff.

¹⁹ IG, Apc, Direzione, July 19, 1968, mf. 020/822 e ff.; F. Barbagallo, *Enrico Berlinguer* (Rome: Carocci, 2006), 96–97.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

PCI's reaction to the possible military intervention in Czechoslovakia by stating that "presently we see no valid reasons for such an intervention, which we consider unthinkable and unacceptable."²¹ As a result, the PCI leadership reached the end of July with an ambiguous and contradictory position that would haunt the PCI for the duration of the Prague Spring crisis. In the words of Longo, on the one hand the PCI was duty-bound to express "understanding and approval" of the Czech reforms and to maintain the PCI's right to formulate and express its own line, but on the other, the party had to confirm that "we are and always will remain in the socialist camp." In case of a Soviet intervention, the PCI intended to express its opposition, but without breaking with the Soviet Union.²²

At the beginning of August, the tense atmosphere seemed to ease. The warm embrace between Brezhnev and Dubček during their meeting at Čierna nad Tisou and an agreement reached by members of the Warsaw Pact in Bratislava on August 3 seemed to indicate that a peaceful resolution of the crisis was within reach. The leaders of the European communist parties left for vacation, which many of them passed at Soviet resorts reserved for Soviet and international communist *nomenklatura*. Thus, a number of PCI leaders, including Longo, Macaluso and others, were vacationing on the Crimea or near Moscow when, in the early morning of August 19, the troops of five Warsaw Pact countries crossed the Czechoslovak border. On the same day, the Politburo approved the text of a letter to forty-four communist parties of the capitalist world justifying the Soviet decision.²³ In this letter to the "leaders of our friends," Moscow announced that "a majority of the members of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party and of the government of Czechoslovakia appealed to us for immediate assistance to the Czechoslovak people in their struggle against the anti-socialist and counter-revolutionary forces of the Right." The letter stressed that the tactics of the Czechoslovak "reactionaries" were different from the 1956 Hungarian uprising, because they tried to discredit the KSČ and mobilize the masses against the KSČ in the upcoming elections. The Soviet Politburo con-

²¹ IG, Apc, Direzione, July 26, 1968, mf. 020/855 e ss.

²² Ibid.

²³ RGANI, f. 3, op. 72, d. 198, 36–46.

sidered particularly scandalous the Czechoslovak reformers' request to "organize political elections under the international control of Great Britain, USA, Italy and France." The main conclusion of the letter was the formulation of the principle that would become known as the Brezhnev Doctrine: "The passage of Czechoslovakia to the capitalist camp would signify a major defeat of the world socialism and the international revolutionary movement..." and hence "the defense of socialism in Czechoslovakia is not an internal matter for that country, but rather an issue impacting the security of all our states and the defense of world socialism."²⁴

The Soviet leadership followed attentively the reaction of European countries, particularly the French and Italian governments, to the armed intervention. Thanks to informers infiltrated deep into key state institutions, including the ministries of foreign affairs, Moscow had virtually immediate access to classified government documents from Rome and Paris and was well-informed about the foreign policy orientations of respective governments. The Soviet leadership remained quite satisfied with the position of de Gaulle's government, according to which "the policy of cooperation with the Soviet Union will be revised only if the Soviet Union abandons its policy of normalizing relations with France and starts moving in a direction hostile to French interests."²⁵ Moscow also approved of the position of French Foreign Minister Debrè, who, during a meeting with his Italian counterpart in London on August 28, repeated that "France will try to distance herself from the Soviet position, but does not intend to change her general policy of overcoming the division of Europe into blocs by maintaining economic, technological, and cultural cooperation with Eastern Europe."²⁶ Conversely, the Italian government's attempts to adopt a stronger line that would recognize a negative impact of the Soviet aggression on the policy of economic, cultural, and technological cooperation with socialist countries²⁷ irritated the Soviets, resulting in increasing pressure on the PCI.

²⁴ Ibid., 43.

²⁵ Vice Chairman of the KGB Nikolaj Zakharov to the Central Committee CPSU, November 29, 1968. RGANI, f. 5, op. 60, d. 492, 158–160.

²⁶ RGANI, f. 5, op. 60, d. 494, 107–109.

²⁷ Ibid., 114–119.

At the moment of the invasion, more than 250 leaders of the foreign communist parties were vacationing in the Soviet Union. The Soviet leadership immediately embarked on an intensive campaign of "clarification" intended to justify military action to this captive audience.²⁸ This campaign did not succeed with the Italian communist leaders, however. Longo called Rome, where a few members of the PCI Executive still remained, including Giorgio Napolitano (today the president of Italy). On August 21, the PCI published an initial declaration in which the PCI Executive expressed its "strong dissent" from the armed intervention in Czechoslovakia, branding it "unjustified" and declaring solidarity with the reformist course of the Czechoslovak CP. Simultaneously, the PCI Executive stressed that its "deep, fraternal, and sincere" relationship with the CPSU remained intact.²⁹ On August 23, all the PCI leaders returned to Rome. During the meeting of the Executive, Longo informed the other members about the situation in Moscow, emphasizing the contradictions in the Soviet documents sent to the PCI, with some documents insisting that a "majority" of Czechoslovak communists, and other documents merely that "many," had invited the armed intervention.³⁰ In the discussion that followed, several members of the Executive expressed unprecedented criticism of Soviet actions. Umberto Terracini, for example, defined the invasion as a colossal blunder on the part of the Soviets and declared his refusal to identify socialism with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Gian Carlo Pajetta suggested a reconsideration of the PCI's dependence on Soviet financial assistance, citing "a price we cannot afford" and noting that a rejection of Soviet financing would give the party more autonomy. Longo tried to trace a middle course by insisting that the Italian communists should defend their right to voice their opinion and support the reformist forces in socialist countries, even against the will of Moscow. He appealed to the old Togliatti formula of "unity in diversity" as a guiding principle of interparty relations within the international communist movement.

On September 2, the Politburo sent another letter to the communist parties of capitalist countries, trying to demonstrate "the neces-

²⁸ RGANI, f. 3, , op. 72, d. 204, 38–39, 57–65.

²⁹ *Documenti politici dall'XI al XII Congresso*, 499–500.

³⁰ IG, Apc, Direzione, riunione del 23 agosto 1968, mf. 020/894 e ff.

sity and urgency” of the Warsaw Pact intervention.³¹ Written in the spirit of Stalinist fabrications, the document affirmed: “It had been established that the counter-revolutionary forces had a large quantity of arms at their disposal. In the very first days, thousands of automatic rifles, hundreds of machine guns, and dozens of bazookas were discovered in various hiding places. Mortars and other heavy weapons have also been found.”³² The Brezhnev Doctrine on the limited sovereignty of socialist states was restated. The conclusion of the letter came in several versions, depending on the addressee. The letters to the leaderships of the communist parties of West Germany, Portugal, Luxembourg, Greece, and Israel; Muslim countries such as Syria, Iran, and Iraq; and Latin American countries like Argentina, Chile, Brazil, and Uruguay concluded as follows: “The Central Committee of the CPSU highly appreciates the position of your party which, in this difficult moment, has demonstrated the sense of international responsibility for the socialist cause by understanding correctly the reasons that prompted the actions of the five fraternal parties in rendering assistance to the Czechoslovak people and the Czechoslovak Communist Party.” The version sent to the other communist parties of Western Europe did not contain any praise but simply informed them that the CPSU had judged unacceptable the proposal by the Italian and Austrian communist parties to convene a conference dedicated to the Czechoslovak issue.³³ Finally, the version “for Rome and Paris only” concluded with an unambiguous warning to the leaderships of the PCI and PCF:

The reporting of the events in Czechoslovakia in the party press cannot possibly contribute to a correct understanding of the class nature of these events by the party members and by the democratic public opinion. The party press that, for reasons of misperceived objectivity and in the absence of any verification, reproduces all or almost all the communications of bourgeois news agencies simply contributes to the disorientation of the party members.³⁴

³¹ RGANI, f. 3, op. 72, d. 201, 21, 31–40.

³² *Ibid.*, 31.

³³ RGANI, f. 3, op. 72, d. 201, 28, 69.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 38.

Another series of Politburo letters to fraternal parties in the capitalist world was sent on September 12, 1968. These new letters were more moderate in tone, evidently due both to the relative success of the "normalization" of Czechoslovakia and to the fact that the PCI and PCF backtracked on their stated intention to convene a conference on the Czechoslovak crisis.³⁵ Still, the relations between Moscow and the two largest Western communist parties remained strained. The Soviet leadership paid considerable attention to the gathering of information and analysis of the internal situation in the PCI. From this point of view, Soviet intelligence, together with diplomats and commercial representatives, proved quite efficient. They could rely on a wide network of informers and "trusted persons" inside the PCI, including members of the pro-Soviet faction in the leadership and among the communist deputies in the Parliament, as well as provincial leaders and functionaries throughout Italy. East European diplomats, especially Polish ones who used their elaborate network of contacts in the Vatican and in Italy in general, proved to be a particularly important source of information.

The new documentation from Soviet archives gives us a clear idea of the nature of information that arrived in Moscow from Italy. For example, a few days after the invasion, a Soviet diplomat passed to Moscow the information he received from a Polish colleague who, in turn, had received it from one of the members of the Central Committee of the PCI.³⁶ The internal situation in the PCI was presented as follows: the majority of local organizations had expressed their "incomprehension and disagreement" with the attitude adopted by PCI leadership. "According to widely held opinion among the party rank and file, the USSR and other four socialist countries had very serious reasons that justified the drastic measures they adopted." The following week, the same Soviet diplomat passed on to Moscow the observations of the Polish Ambassador that the Italian Communist leadership was contaminated by "social-democratic tendencies," while the party as a whole is "infested by petty-bourgeois and social-democratic elements." The ambassador opined that "in all likelihood, our Italian friends, together with the French and certain other communist parties, would

³⁵ RGANI, f. 3, op. 72, d. 204, 38–39, 57–65.

³⁶ RGANI, f. 5, op. 60, d. 493, 160 ff.

like to create a third pole of the international communist movement in Western Europe, alongside those guided by Moscow and Beijing. This is a bitter pill which we have to swallow.”³⁷ Soviet diplomats and agents were particularly interested in the situation in the local party organizations. Typical in this respect was a summary of a meeting with the communist member of Parliament Antonio Guidi, sent to Moscow by the first secretary of the Soviet embassy in Rome.³⁸ Analyzing the situation in the local party organizations of Umbria, the communist representative emphasized a sharp split between the supporters of the leadership’s “profound disagreement” with the action of five Warsaw Pact countries and others who insisted on “the necessity of making a correct class-based choice at a time when American imperialism is growing increasingly aggressive.” According to Guidi, a noticeable part of the communist parliamentary faction believed that the leadership was promoting a “revision of the strategic principles of the party,” but refrained from expressing this sentiment openly because the party leadership was dominated by G. Amendola’s group, which was almost social-democratic in its orientation. Similar information arrived from communist federations in the Liguria and Lazio regions: the political course taken by the PCI’s leadership was supported by the party *intelligentsia*, while the working-class members expressed serious misgivings or even outright opposition.³⁹

Summing up the information received from a variety of sources, at the end of December 1968, the deputy chairman of the KGB presented to the Central Committee of the CPSU a report recapitulating the situation within the PCI that could be summarized as follows:

1. The party line regarding Czechoslovakia was heavily criticized by a considerable part of the membership, particularly long-term communists occupying rank-and-file positions, especially in predominantly working class and peasant sections;
2. The party *intelligentsia*, federation-level activists, and student groups essentially supported the PCI leadership’s line on the Czechoslovak question;

³⁷ RGANI, f. 5, op. 60, d. 493, 110–113.

³⁸ RGANI, f. 5, op. 60, d. 493, 181–184.

³⁹ RGANI, f. 5, op. 60, delo 493, 189 ff.; f. 5, op. 61, d. 582, 121–131.

3. In private discussions, certain leading figures of the PCI [followed by references to Giovanni Amendola, Umberto Terracini, and Gian Carlo Pajetta] favor the weakening of ties with the communist parties of the five socialist countries that sent troops to Czechoslovakia.⁴⁰

The information concerning disagreements and schisms between the PCI leadership that condemned the invasion and the many rank-and-file members who supported it proved of primary importance in the elaboration of the Kremlin's policy towards the rebellious PCI. It strengthened Moscow's conviction that the PCI's resistance would be short-lived, not only because of the strong pro-Soviet faction within the PCI leadership, but also because Moscow enjoyed considerable support from the rank and file. Moreover, the presence of Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia guaranteed that the "normalization" of the country would proceed unimpeded. From late September onward, the tone of Moscow's communications with PCI became less diplomatic. Thus, sending *Pravda's* editor-in-chief Zimjanin to France and Italy to participate in festivals of the national communist newspapers, the Politburo provided him with the following instructions to convey to Longo: "We have taken note of comrade Longo's communication that the PCI leadership rejected the proposal by Austrian, British and Australian Communist parties to convene a conference of West European Communist parties on the question of Czechoslovakia... but we do not agree with Longo's opinion that an international conference of Communist parties would be 'useless and impossible' at the present moment." The Politburo further warned Longo that "concentrating on the Czechoslovak question does not serve the interests either of the international communist movement or the process of normalization in Czechoslovakia."⁴¹

On October 28, the Politburo sent another letter addressed to sixty-three communist parties of the capitalist world that provided Moscow's interpretation of the 1968 Czechoslovak events and, in par-

⁴⁰ Vice Chairman of the KGB Nikolaj Zakharov to the Central Committee CPSU, December 27, 1968. RGANI, f. 5, op. 60, d. 493, 253 ff.

⁴¹ RGANI, f. 3, op. 72, d. 207, 10, 28 ff.

ticular, Moscow's analysis of the "normalization" process.⁴² The main goal of this long document was to justify the Kremlin's decision to station troops on Czechoslovak territory for an indefinite period of time "to guarantee the security of the socialist camp in view of the strengthening of the revanchist and neo-Nazi forces in West Germany." Soviet leaders understood perfectly well that their actions would be perceived by international public opinion as an "occupation," but this did not disturb Moscow. On the other hand, the Politburo was indignant that "the action of the socialist countries was defined as an 'occupation' by some organs of Western communist press." As the letter emphasized, "such an evaluation represents a total falsification of reality," since the armed intervention "had no other objective than the consolidation of socialism in Czechoslovakia, the defense of its independence, and the protection of common goals of world socialism."⁴³

Simultaneously, the Politburo sent a separate letter to Longo severely criticizing the PCI leadership and the party press.⁴⁴ Citing the communist newspapers and journals that "accused the Soviet Union of establishing an occupation regime in Czechoslovakia," the Kremlin leaders retorted: "We are firmly convinced that the current position of the Italian communist press cannot properly orient the Italian communists, cannot explain the true meaning of the Czechoslovak events, and cannot contribute to the strengthening of class solidarity and proletarian internationalism." The Politburo's letter to Longo concluded with an open threat: "... we hope that the PCI leadership will take into account our observations and issue necessary instructions to the editors of party publications. Comrade Longo should understand that if these publications continue in the same vein, the Soviet press would be compelled to rebut the tendentious information that distorts the real significance of the facts and events." Clearly, the Politburo's criticisms were not limited to the party press, and Moscow unambiguously threatened the PCI leadership with an open conflict in which all instruments of pressure would be used, up to and including a possible break with the PCI.

What type of leverage could Moscow use to influence the PCI? The first and most immediate instrument was a reduction of financial

⁴² RGANI, f. 3, op. 72, d. 214, 14, 55–78.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 67–68.

⁴⁴ RGANI, f. 3, op. 72, d. 214, 15, 82–85.

subsidies. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, ample documentation on the Soviet financing of the international communist movement has surfaced in Moscow archives.⁴⁵ For many years, the PCI received the largest share of Soviet subsidies among all the Western communist parties. When, in 1968, the PCI expressed its disagreement with the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, Moscow immediately played the subsidy card. In October 1968, when one of the leading Italian communists, Armando Cossutta, met in Moscow with Boris Ponomarev, the Politburo's overseer of relations with Western communist parties, the latter immediately expressed "surprise, disappointment, and indignation" with respect to the political position taken by some members of the PCI Executive and accused them of social-democratic tendencies. As to Soviet subsidies to the PCI, Ponomarev unceremoniously declared that "Soviet resources are not unlimited" and that Soviet aid would "now be directed to the communist parties of Cuba, Vietnam, and Arab countries as the first priority."⁴⁶ Thus, the direct Soviet financial subsidy to the PCI, previously budgeted at \$7 million for 1969, was cut to \$3.7 million and remained frozen at that level for the next three years. Only in 1972, at the personal request of Longo, did Moscow increase the subsidy to \$6.2 million. Moreover, Moscow threatened to close another, more important source of indirect financing of the PCI: the commercial contracts between Italian firms and Soviet organizations arranged by the PCI in exchange for a kickback paid by the Italian firms to the PCI coffers.⁴⁷

In addition to financial pressure, Moscow had another, even more powerful lever to exercise its influence on the PCI: a threat of splitting the party by prompting the pro-Soviet faction to leave the PCI. As we have seen, the Kremlin obtained detailed information about the divergence between the leadership and a considerable number of local organizations and rank-and-file members on the Czechoslovak ques-

⁴⁵ G. Cervetti, *L'oro di Mosca. La testimonianza di un protagonista* (Milan: Baldini and Castoldi, 1993); V. Zaslavsky, "I finanziamenti sovietici alle forze politiche italiane di sinistra," in *Nuova Storia Contemporanea* 6 (1999); V. Riva, *Oro da Mosca. I finanziamenti sovietici al Pci dalla Rivoluzione d'ottobre al crollo dell'Urss* (Mondadori, 1999).

⁴⁶ A. Höbel, "Il Pci," 1165.

⁴⁷ V. Zaslavsky, *Lo stalinismo e la sinistra italiana. Dal mito dell'Urss alla fine del comunismo 1945-1991* (Milan: Mondadori, 2004), 134-150.

tion. The PCI leadership was also aware that its condemnation of the Soviet intervention enjoyed only limited support among the party base. Napolitano's report on the internal situation within the PCI, presented to the Executive on August 23, made a deep impression on other PCI leaders. According to Napolitano, while local party leaders "almost unanimously approved" the Executive's statement expressing "serious dissent" from Soviet intervention, many rank-and-file members disagreed.⁴⁸ The PCI leadership did not doubt that Moscow could and would use the pro-Soviet faction in the leadership and the pro-Soviet attitude of many rank-and-file members to split the party. The only way to organizational and electoral safety for the Italian communist leadership was to reconcile with Moscow on the Czechoslovak question and confirm that the PCI would always remain an integral part of the socialist camp.

Thus Longo could call the Soviet invasion a "tragic error" and yet continue to insist that "in the greater struggle between socialism and capitalism, our place is always on the side of socialism, on the side of countries and parties that have realized socialism."⁴⁹ The high mark of dissent was expressed by Longo's future successor as the secretary of the PCI, Enrico Berlinguer, who in September 1968 anticipated "the possibility of a political struggle against our Soviet comrades."⁵⁰ But political realism and the pragmatic need to normalize relations with the Soviet Union rapidly gained the upper hand. At the November 1968 meeting in Moscow between PCI and CPSU delegations, a "common approach to all essential problems" was reached, even if attitudes towards the situation in Czechoslovakia continued to differ.⁵¹ In his report to the PCI Executive about this meeting, Berlinguer emphasized the "Soviet interest in finding a formula that would allow Moscow to continue its policy in Czechoslovakia... without entering into an open polemic with us."⁵² After a subsequent meeting in Budapest, Berlinguer affirmed that Moscow had taken a defensive position to avoid a clash with the PCI and other West European communist parties that, according to Berlinguer, maintained a "firm stance" on the side of the Soviet

⁴⁸ IG, APC, Direzione, mf. 020, fasc. 894, August 23, 1968.

⁴⁹ A. Höbel, "Il Pci," 1161-1162.

⁵⁰ IG, APC, Direzione, mf. 020, fasc. 939, September 18, 1968.

⁵¹ *Documenti politici*, 543-545.

⁵² IG, APC, Direzione, mf. 020, fasc. 1161, November 16, 1968.

Union.⁵³ When an international conference of the communist parties finally took place in Moscow in June 1969, Berlinguer's speech was critical of Moscow, insisting on the autonomy of parties comprising the international communist movement. Berlinguer even refused to sign certain points of the conference's concluding declaration.

For many years, this attitude of the Italian leadership, and Berlinguer's position in particular, played a major role in the PCI historiography, with many historians focusing on the growing divergence between the PCI and the CPSU as an indication of the PCI's autonomy from Moscow. It has been argued that the PCI began its escape from Moscow's political orbit by "disapproving" of the Czechoslovak intervention and that this disapproval evolved into the search for the "third way" and attempts to build up a "Eurocommunist movement" independent of the Kremlin. While there is some truth to this historical interpretation, new Soviet documents demonstrate that the extent of the PCI's post-1968 autonomy from the Soviet Union should not be exaggerated.

The attitude of Brezhnev's leadership towards the PCI in the decade between the invasion of Czechoslovakia and that of Afghanistan in 1979 can be briefly characterized as follows. The "normalization" of post-1968 Czechoslovakia was by and large successful, from the Soviet perspective, even though it required several years of occupation. In those years, all of the Prague Spring leaders were removed from the political arena, and the Czechoslovak Communist Party underwent a grandiose purge, resulting in the expulsion of some half a million members. Moreover, about 200,000 Czechoslovak citizens managed to emigrate to the West. The reinforcement of Soviet positions in Czechoslovakia and in the Warsaw Pact as a whole permitted Moscow to pursue a more tolerant line with respect to the PCI "dissent." Their self-confidence regained, the Kremlin leaders could afford to bide their time, relying on the PCI's financial and ideological dependence on Moscow. In March 1973, Brezhnev optimistically summarized the results of the Soviet foreign policy to the Politburo as follows:

Convening the Conference of the international communist movement just a year after the Czechoslovak events was a difficult en-

⁵³ IG, APC, Direzione, mf. 020, fasc. 1251, December 5, 1968.

terprise. But it led to one of the greatest successes of our policy towards fraternal communist parties. We ourselves probably underestimated and undervalued our success. Foreign policy has to be offensive in nature, but like any other policy, it has to include compromise, flexibility, and mutual understanding... Our policy is now part and parcel of the international Communist movement.”

Among the influential foreign communist parties that came closest to aligning with the Soviet policy, Brezhnev singled out the French, Italian, British, American, Finnish, and West German communist parties.⁵⁴

During this period, the general Soviet attitude towards the international communist movement was undergoing a change. The Italian historian Silvio Pons labeled the Soviet position vis-à-vis world communism “enigmatic,” because Moscow tended to systematically ignore the increasing weakness and loss of influence of the communist parties that cast their lot with the Soviet Union.⁵⁵ Soviet documents and the observations and memoirs of the political protagonists in Moscow shed new light on the Soviet attitude towards the PCI and, more generally, the international communist movement. Anatoly Chernyaev, one of the top functionaries of the Soviet party apparatus, who supervised the relations between Moscow and Western communist parties under Brezhnev, participated in numerous meetings of the Politburo and plenums of the Central Committee, and would later become a personal advisor to Gorbachev, perceptively described the situation in his diaries:

The international communist movement was melting before our eyes, losing its political and ideological potential... Western communist parties were alternately attracted and repelled by the superpower that provided the very reason and the material foundation for their existence... Totally dependent on us materially, they were rejecting the Soviet model for their countries. But without the Soviet Union or arrayed against the Soviet

⁵⁴ *Generalnyj sekretar' L. I. Brezhnev, 1964–1982* (Moscow: Vestnik Arkhiva Prezidenta Rossijskoj Federazii, 2006), 130–133.

⁵⁵ S. Pons, “L'URSS e il PCI nel sistema internazionale della guerra fredda,” in R. Gualtieri, ed., *Il PCI nell'Italia repubblicana 1943–1991* (Rome: Carocci, 2001), 29.

state, they were doomed. The Brezhnev leadership lost interest in them, since they were not needed any longer in the context of *Realpolitik*.”⁵⁶

For Chernyaev, 1975 marked “the beginning of the end of the communist movement as a meaningful European or even international force.”⁵⁷

The reaction to the Prague Spring and the conclusions reached by the Soviets and the Italian Communist Party differed dramatically. In the Soviet Union, the dominant reaction to the Czechoslovak events by the Brezhnev leadership was the abandonment of economic liberalization and the enhanced political rigidity both inside the Soviet Union and in the other Warsaw Pact countries. This political course maintained internal stability in the short term, but resulted in stagnation and the eventual collapse of the Soviet system. As the Russian historian Rudolf Pikhoya has concluded, “for the Soviet leadership it became clear, not theoretically but practically, that real existing socialism could not be reformed in principle, that reforms and socialism were mutually exclusive concepts and that they had to choose either reforms or socialism... The regime became simpler, more cynical, and more straightforward.”⁵⁸ Soviet intelligentsia and students, for whom the Soviet invasion destroyed the last vestiges of revolutionary idealism and communist ideals, arrived at the same conclusions. It was no accident that both the dissident and the emigration movements in the Soviet Union got their impetus from the military intervention in Czechoslovakia.⁵⁹ Only many years later would the Soviet leadership arrive at the understanding that the 1968 invasion had been a mistake, as Yuri Andropov indirectly admitted during the 1980–1981 Polish crisis, when he noted that the quota for military interventions had been exhausted.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ A. Chernyaev, *Byl li u Rossii shans? On poslednij* (Moscow: Sobranie, 2003), 14, 21, 25.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁵⁸ R. Pichoja, *Sovetskij Sojuz*, 342–343.

⁵⁹ V. Zaslavsky and R. Brym, *Soviet-Jewish Emigration and Soviet Nationality Policy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983); V. Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

⁶⁰ Yu. Musatov, “Sovetskij Sojuz i Prazhskaja vesna 1968 g.,” in *Chekhija I Slovakija v XX v.*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Nauka, 2005), 229.

Paradoxically, the effect of the Prague Spring on the PCI was exactly the opposite: while the intervention in Czechoslovakia liberated Soviet citizens from various ideological illusions, the illusions of Italian communists were largely reinforced. The very fact that the Czechoslovak reformist movement had to be suppressed by force encouraged the PCI leaders in their illusion that “real socialism” could be reformed. To them, for all its defects, Soviet socialism still appeared to be the more progressive system: Berlinguer said repeatedly that “the moral climate in the countries of real socialism was incomparably superior of that in the capitalist countries.”⁶¹ For many rank-and-file Italian communists, the suppression of the Czechoslovak reforms was justified by the “urgent need to defend socialism.” Raised on the theory of the class struggle, anti-capitalism, and the inevitability of revolution, many Italian communists remained deeply pro-Soviet and never managed to reconcile themselves with the collapse of the Soviet system.⁶² The PCI ideologues whose identity was based on the belief that “real socialism” was superior to capitalism could not even dare to ask what would have happened if the Prague reformers had gained the upper hand. Their ideological convictions did not permit them to imagine the future that would come to pass some twenty years later in the Czech and Slovak republics after the collapse of “real socialism”—the return to a market economy, a multiparty system, and the European Union.

There is no doubt that the PCI’s reluctance to break with the Soviet Union was to a certain extent conditioned by Soviet subsidies, as the interruption of Soviet financing would, in Longo’s words, result in “the gravest political and material consequences.”⁶³ But an even more important factor keeping the PCI in the Soviet orbit was the ideological allegiance of its members, leaders and rank-and-file members alike, based on anti-capitalism and demonization of social democracy. During the decade after the Prague Spring, a peculiar “culture of crisis” enveloped the PCI. Italian communists saw a looming crisis everywhere in the capitalist world and in the international arena, with-

⁶¹ J. Pelikan, *Io, esule indigesto. Il Pci e la lezione del '68 di Praga* (with A. Carloti) (Milan: Reset, 1998), 70.

⁶² See P. Ignazi, *Dal Pci al Pds* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1992), 154; see also D. Kertzer, *Politics and Symbols: The Italian Communist Party and the Fall of Communism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 59.

⁶³ IG, APC, Direzione, mf. 006, April 16, 1968.

out realizing that the epicenter of the crisis was located in the Soviet bloc and in the international communist movement itself. Blinkered by their communist identity, the PCI members embarked on a permanent search for a mythical “third way” between the Soviet model and social democracy, generating a sterile “Eurocommunism,” virulent anti-Americanism, and glorification of the Third World as the crucible of anti-capitalist revolution. Even the most liberal among the Italian communists, like Amendola, did not dare to condemn Soviet violations of state sovereignty and human rights, as this would “benefit the forces of the Right” and embolden the enemies of détente. One of the central contradictions of the PCI position was that it recognized the right of Third World peoples to defend their independence while denying the same right to the victims of Soviet aggression. As Chernyaev justifiably concluded, during the last decade of the Soviet existence, Western communist parties, “without confessing it, came to understand the irrelevance of the communist movement either for the majority of the countries where it was formally present or, even more important, for the Soviet Union itself.”⁶⁴ Unable to break with a bankrupt Soviet Union, the Italian Communist Party condemned itself to extinction.

⁶⁴ A. Chernyaev, *Byl li u Rossii shans*, 28.

CĂTĂLIN AVRAMESCU

“Don’t Push Us, Comrade!”

De Gaulle in Bucharest

Originally scheduled to take place in June 1967 but postponed because of the Six-Day War, the French president’s visit to Romania finally took place the following year, when, from May 14 to 18, de Gaulle was the guest of Nicolae Ceaușescu. It was a momentous time for France. During the visit, strikes and street violence escalated in Paris. News about developments on the home front reached the French delegation without interruption. For instance, in Craiova, a small provincial town in Romania, the French installed two special telephones and three fax machines. The worries of the French party would prove well-founded. The visit was cut short by half a day. In Paris, black and red flags were unfurled on the Sorbonne, next to the banner of the Vietcong. Although he did not know it at the time, de Gaulle was approaching the end of his political career. The context of the visit was complex also from the perspective of the Romanian delegation. The Romanians were engaged at that time in a tug-of-war with the Soviets, a dangerous game which culminated in August 1968, after the invasion of Czechoslovakia, with a public spat with the leaders of the Soviet Union. It is significant that Ceaușescu’s only reference, in the talks with de Gaulle, to his calendar of foreign visits was to his incoming meeting with Tito.

The 1968 visit was undoubtedly a carefully orchestrated PR exercise. The Romanians went out of their way to impress de Gaulle. His motorcade, complete with an open convertible, stopped in almost every village of the 200 miles from Craiova to Bucharest. Hundreds of thousands cheered and waved French and Romanian flags. The French delegation sampled traditional Romanian foods and was entertained by folk music bands who showed up, as if by miracle, at every crossroad.

My point, however, is that this visit is significant not primarily for what it was, an elaborate exercise in deception, but rather for what it never was, and was never intended to be: an occasion for a critical appraisal of the realities of communist Eastern Europe. It is common in the historical reconstruction of 1968 to emphasize the revolutionary quality of that year. But in records of the visit in Romania, we discover a very different perspective.

One biographical note, before we continue. In 1968 I was only one year old, so I have no personal recollection of the event, except perhaps as Freudian traces. But as a young, impressionable teenager in socialist Romania, I wondered what Ceaușescu and his frequent foreign guests could possibly argue about. Decades later, after some of the records of the official discussions became available, I could not repress a feeling of disillusionment. The minutes of the personal encounter between Ceaușescu and de Gaulle are, from this perspective, especially disappointing. What appeared, no doubt, to most Romanians as an event on the world stage was in fact a dry, even dull, exchange.

The agenda of the visit was mixed. De Gaulle was shown a huge chemical plant in Craiova, built with the assistance of the French company Pechiney. In addition (again in Craiova) he toured a new factory producing locomotives. I did not find anything that would indicate de Gaulle was told these were, in fact, ASEA locomotives, built under an agreement with the Swedish company. The economic implications of the visit, thus, appear to have been rather underwhelming.

Nor does the cultural agenda of the visit seem impressive. There was the night at the opera, with a fairly postmodern program, a mixture of Ravel, Saint-Saëns, and traditional “folk” music and dances. Before that was a visit to the city park where, hidden in an alley, there is a small monument honoring the soldiers fallen in World War I as part of the French military mission in Romania. There was one short, formal, visit to the Law School of the University, where nothing of substance was uttered. On top of that, copious amounts of cultural *kitsch* were provided by the hosts: at virtually every banquet or stopover were bands of singers performing everything from *café-concert* to “popular” ballads.

In the end, even the political meetings presupposed by the visit turned out not to be as memorable as one might have expected. There was one protocol meeting at the Palace Victoria, with the notables of the regime, and one in the former Royal Palace, where the “formal”

negotiations between the two delegations took place. The speech de Gaulle gave to the "Great National Assembly" (the communist version of the Parliament) was received with polite indifference, and the hosts gave the impression of being relieved when everything was over and de Gaulle headed for his car.

The only noteworthy part of the program, though for all the wrong reasons, must have been the *tête-à-tête* between Ceaușescu and de Gaulle. We have the exact minutes of the discussion of May 14, 1968, thanks to the notes of Sanda Stolojan, de Gaulle's French translator, a text published with the authorization of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The minutes of the meeting suggest that de Gaulle did not have a clear foreign policy agenda. There was some emphasis on the need to contain the influence of the United States. France, de Gaulle bragged, helped the United States "to liberate themselves from the English." This was the beginning of a "long friendship" possible only because then the United States was not "imperialistic." Now, however, "America dominates due to its power and its economy." But this was a mistake, de Gaulle said, as proved, for instance, by Vietnam. Ceaușescu seems not to have taken an interest in the anti-American ranting of de Gaulle. During the discussion, there was only one, short, observation about Romania "taking notice" of the U.S. policy of "domination." Ceaușescu asserted that his country had taken steps to ensure that this policy "might not harm others." Even with the benefit of hindsight, it is impossible to discern what these steps were.

It appears that Ceaușescu did not have much to say on the current state of international relations, either. He listened to the improvised lesson in history delivered by de Gaulle and replied with one of his own. Russia was marginally more interesting for him than America. He stated his good intentions towards Russia and the role played by this country in Europe. De Gaulle seems to have considered Russia only from the point of view of its function in checking the American superpower. Thus he cautiously remarked that Russia's role was positive, but only inasmuch as its power did not grow "beyond measure." De Gaulle did not indicate where the limit might be and what France could do about it, and Ceaușescu did not take up this issue either.

What was de Gaulle's plan, then? The only indication that he might have had a plan is his mention of the political blocs and alliances of Europe. France, de Gaulle claimed, was "adamantly opposed" to

the existence of "blocs" such as NATO and the Warsaw Pact; these were, nevertheless, a necessity, due to the confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union. Whether a foreseeable alternative to these "blocs" could be envisaged was not clear. Both Ceaușescu and de Gaulle appeared convinced that the "independence" of the European countries was the solution. There was one marginal disagreement here, on the issue of the European Community. Ceaușescu, fearful of the implications of the ill-fated Valev plan, stated that the Common Market, although "well-intentioned," was "not an actual solution for us," precisely because of the "need for independent development of each country." De Gaulle appeared willing to explain: "The Common Market is not supra-national... it is an association." To the question of the reunification of Germany, both statesmen seemed to talk in different languages, without either of them even noticing. De Gaulle stated that the reunification of Germany was necessary for the troubles in Europe to stop. Ceaușescu agreed, but then he suggested, unopposed by de Gaulle, that "some Western countries recognize the GDR." He also appeared to have reached the conclusion that "we are against the blocs," as they were an "obstacle in the path of peace in Europe." This was a hint, probably, of the bolder attitude Ceaușescu would display in public during the invasion of Czechoslovakia.

If there was one topic that Ceaușescu pursued with some interest, it was of presenting Romania as somewhat independent from the Soviet Union. He reacted to the implication that the communist regimes were imposed by the Soviets from above, after the end of the war. Romanian communism, he suggested, was supported by the entire people. "Internal forces" propelled Romania forward on its way to development.

The truly interesting thing in this conversation was how the two leaders managed to avoid any reference to the nature of their regimes, especially to communism. Answering an observation made by Ceaușescu that the presence of Soviet troops in Austria, Iran, or Finland did not bring the establishment of a communist regime, de Gaulle remarked: "I have never talked [to you] about the regime... In the USSR and here such a regime is useful, because it motivates the people." Ceaușescu: "I did not want either to talk about the political regimes." At the end of their meeting, the two leaders congratulated themselves for the fruitful discussion. De Gaulle's conclusion, following the exchange on the justification and origins of communism: "We love you the way you are!" Indeed.

That Ceaușescu avoided any discussion of the nature of his regime is evident in another remarkable document, this one from the National Czech Archives (ref. SUA A UV KSC, f. 02/1, P 4750, published by Mihai Retegan in 1998). It details the minutes of the discussion of August 15, 1968, between the delegation of the Czechoslovak communists, led by Dubček, and the delegation of the Romanian Communist Party, headed by Ceaușescu. Unlike in Bucharest, in Prague we have a marked contrast between the discourses of the two leaders. Dubček attempted an analysis of the nature of the political transformations already underway in Czechoslovakia. The evolutions in his country, Dubček stated, were caused by a number of "differences" between different classes and groups in the society. He emphasized the difference between the Czech and the Yugoslav models and claimed that in his country there was "a new system for the management of the economy." Dubček's intervention included a consistent, if somewhat dogmatic, discussion of the developments of new political groups in Czechoslovakia, including "right-wing tendencies and various sectarian movements." Most significant, Dubček recognized that "the party should not replace other institutions" and that the party was mistaken to take over administrative tasks.

Ceaușescu, on the other hand, did not show any inclination to debate the merits of the varieties of socialism. His lengthy intervention reviewed the evolution and the state of the relations between the socialist countries. He constantly emphasized the need for each country to interpret the principles of communism in a way that was appropriate to its internal conditions, without ever stopping to consider what exactly these principles might be. At one point, Ceaușescu even admonished the Czechoslovak Communist Party not to interfere with the decisions of Romanian communists.

In directly addressing Dubček shortly before the intervention of the Warsaw Pact, Ceaușescu did not seem to be searching for a non-Stalinist variant of socialism. "The central organs of the party reserve the right to control and manage the whole of the economic activity. The Romanian Communist Party believes that it would be difficult to ensure, by any other method, the directing of a modern industrial development."

The most significant aspect of Ceaușescu's discourse, however, lay elsewhere. Addressing the question of the similarity between the Czech

and the Romanian evolution, the Romanian leader claimed that in his country the party noticed some “problems,” such as a beginning of estrangement between intellectuals and the cadres, even before the Ninth Congress (before 1965, that is). Decisive measures were taken and a campaign of “elucidation” was launched. The obvious implication of this was that no reforms similar to those of the Czechs were needed any longer in Romania.

What the Czech delegation made of this was not recorded. The only reaction was that of “Comrade Cernik” (Oldrich Cernik, the Czechoslovak prime minister): “Our evolution is linked with the crisis of theoretical reflection, itself a consequence of the Stalinist practice.” Cernik’s interest in clarifying the “notion of socialism” appears to have fallen on deaf ears.

What are we to make of this? Nineteen sixty-eight marked, in many ways, a climax of critical thinking. Both in Western and Eastern Europe, debates on the variants and merits of socialism and liberal democracy were raging. Yet, even in this dynamic context, we see Ceaușescu and de Gaulle avoiding discussing and weighing the nature and the merits of their respective regimes. Furthermore, they consciously rejected the suggestion that this could be a valid topic of debate. During the meeting with the Czech leaders, Ceaușescu came close to refuting the entire notion of Marxism “revisionism,” in the name of a personal and self-contained understanding of communism.

It is ironic, then, that a meeting which was seen by many as a historic encounter failed to address a major issue in both countries. The notes from their discussion show Ceaușescu and de Gaulle as more willing to escape the implications of 1968 than to lead the way.

That was not, of course, the way history was seen and experienced by the man in the street. During the visit of the president of France, crowds literally lined the streets to catch a glimpse of de Gaulle. The expectation of ordinary Romanians was that the leaders of their country were also caught up in the reform movement of 1968. The official translator of de Gaulle remembers one Romanian who was pushed back by a policeman. The man retorted: “Do not push us, comrade, this time we came here out of our own free will!” It was precisely that will that neither Ceaușescu nor de Gaulle was prepared to consider in May 1968.

CHARLES S. MAIER

Conclusion

1968—Did It Matter?

Sixty years ago, and twenty years before the events of 1968, historians commemorated the 100th anniversary of the revolutions of 1848. Recall the wave of upheavals that gripped continental Europe from February 1848 through the spring of 1849. Demonstrations in Palermo spread to Naples, Rome and the North of Italy, and even more quickly to Paris, Baden, Berlin, Vienna, Prague, Budapest, the salons of Poland and even Petersburg. Rulers made concessions, ceded constitutions, or even abdicated. The ancient Metternich fled to London, his supposed “system” discredited. But then the radicals divided; the authorities in Central Europe recovered their nerve and slowly suppressed the would-be revolutionaries in one city after another. They did not stint on soldiers, or on shooting and hanging revolutionary leaders they captured. And when in Eastern Europe it looked as if the revolution might successfully revive via Hungary in the spring of 1849, the Russians intervened to suppress the uprising. The revolutionary wave smashed against the granite breakwater of the czar’s empire, and Russian soldiers marched into East Central Europe to wipe out resistance and punish those who resisted. Twenty-one years later, however, in 1870, Russia’s leaders would stand aside and allow the Germans to unify their country without opposition. Austria had forfeited their support, while Bismarck’s Prussia had gained it.

The general verdict on the upheavals that had gripped almost all of Europe in 1848 (with some echoes even in Britain and Russia, those two peripheral societies), and to a degree the Americas as well, was that they had “failed.” One of the titles that summed up the prevailing wisdom in 1948 was that 1848 had been “a turning point that had failed to turn.” Marx and Engels, in fact, had dwelled on the reasons for failure

in their contemporary interpretations on German and French events: *Revolution and Counter-Revolution* and *The Eighteenth Brumaire*. The question of failure has always remained dominant for historians—more so than that of origins. Indeed, the trope of failure has been so prevalent that it often obscures what the experiences of 1848 did manage to achieve: heightened national consciousness, a national parliamentary prototype in Germany, the advent of constitutional monarchy with parliaments in Prussia and Piedmont, the end of inherited monarchy in France, and the final abolition of serfdom in Austria.

The revolutions of 1848, of course, bear some intriguing superficial resemblances to the upheavals during and around 1968. They were intensely contagious phenomena, with rebels in one society rapidly learning from those in others; they incorporated diverse and often contending ideological visions—nationalist, liberal and elitist, democratic, socialist, and ethnically populist—whose adherents briefly converged and then went their separate ways. And their year or half-year of relative success soon gave way to collapse, repression, reaction—and often, on the part of those who took part as enthusiastic youth, later repentance. Social Darwinist materialism or realism allegedly replaced romanticism; one-time radicals became sober statesmen. Looking back in 1948, the revolutions of 1848 seemed to have come and gone—a youthful romantic fling after which the protagonists had settled down to far more stable and, alas, sometimes unhappy marriages.

Is this to be our assessment of 1968 forty years after the events—a brief manifestation of late adolescent political hormones that left memories, friendships, ideas (but ideas often generated throughout the 1960s or even longer), but little institutional legacy? In fact, to judge just from the papers discussed at this conference, historians have not made failure a prominent theme. Except in the case of Czechoslovakia, “failure” does not seem the appropriate term for the dissipation of protest in 1968; and we know that the transformation of Czechoslovakia failed because of massive Russian intervention (as was the case in Hungary in 1849 and 1956). This should be encouraging news. But one reason that historians do not judge 1968 in terms of failure is that there were no benchmarks for what would have constituted success. What the ’68ers sought was a spirit of democratic or anarchic renewal expressed in such slogans as *sous les pavés la plage*, which offered no way to measure achievement. Whereas the revolutionaries of 1848

compelled their rulers to liberalize their governments or substitute others, even if only for a few months, the radicals of 1968 did not prevail even as briefly as the demonstrators of 1848.

In Paris, Berlin, Turin, and Mexico City, protesting students in 1968 may have aspired to regime change. Nonetheless, they targeted their universities and not their ministries—convinced that the university served as the key institution for “reproducing” a bureaucratic capitalism they saw as the source of repression. “If at the beginning of the 1960s, the brain of a perverse sociologist had imagined some sort of geometric place where all the contradictions of Gaullist France converged, the site of the new University [of Nanterre] would have easily served,” Hervé Hamon and Patrick Rotman have written in their vivid chronicle of French events. “On a microcosm of a few hectares, [there contended] the modern and the obsolete, opulence and poverty, the sinister gates of the low-rent HLM developments...the monstrous trenches of the RER, the metro of tomorrow, the shanty towns that had formerly been bastions of the [Algerian] FLN—and lost in this debauchery of industrial hangars and rail lines, the sanctuary where the spirit breathed and science triumphed.”¹ This is not to say that student leaders did not dream that revolution needed somehow to follow the assault on the university and their massive mobilization. Again, Hamon and Rotman describe how, even when the communists were already backing away from the May movement, student leaders believed that wildcat strikes would escape the party’s dead hand, and they could seize power. They made preparations to march from the Left Bank to take the City Hall, perhaps the Ministry of Finance, they remembered Stanley Kubrick’s film *Spartacus*. “La fête est finie, on passe à l’offensive.” They did apparently end up torching the Bourse, but French capitalism hardly halted. The French believed in the *grande journée* and the theater of revolution. But hypnotized by the theatrical, they took for granted their new *lieux de mémoire* even before they had seized them.²

That is why the major question about 1968 is not why revolution failed, for revolution hardly began. Instead, I believe, reckoning with

¹ Hervé Hamon and Patrick Rotman, *Génération. 1. Les années de rêve* (Paris: Seuil, 1987), 385.

² *Ibid.*, 534–572.

1968 means addressing other questions. A major one is that of significance. This is not an issue of explanation but of interpretation, and the answers must remain subjective: What did the protests of 1968 amount to? Were they important? What did the protesters want? How should we evaluate them? Interpretation differs from explanation. The question does not ask directly why the events took place, nor why they ended, but whether they really mattered and for whom they mattered.

“The Most Wonderful Thing”?

For 1968 in the West, assessments of significance have tended to polarize. Many interpreters assume that the movements of 1968 transformed society, making it less hierarchical and more democratic.³ They sometimes take the benevolence of the protagonists for granted and recite the proclaimed goals of participatory democracy as self-evidently progressive. Critical interpreters believe precious institutions were damaged and stress instead the posturing, repression of dissent, and violence of the movements. The issue of significance is tied up with our moral evaluation of those who took part. Those who lived through the events at Harvard will recall the parable dramatically recited by the economic historian Alexander Gerschenkron at a divided faculty meeting, after students were forcibly cleared from university buildings in April 1969. Somewhat as in the tale of Hans Christian Andersen’s emperor’s nightingale, a king received a fantastically elaborate clock, which he declared was “the most wonderful thing.” At this, a barbarian lout strode up to the machine, smashed it with a sledgehammer, and declared as he delivered his blow: “No, this is the most wonderful thing.” Gerschenkron made it clear that the complex and ingenious apparatus represented the modern university, and the barbarian wielding the hammer was the unruly student movement. To take a controversy that made headlines in 2005—and one that Paul Berman has ad-

³ Carole Fink, Philipp Gassert, and Detlef Junker, eds., *1968: The World Transformed* (Washington, DC, and Cambridge: German Historical Institute and Cambridge University Press, 1998). For a sharp critique of the importance of the French 1968 and its French interpreters, see Michael M. Seidman, *The Imaginary Revolution: Parisian Students and Workers in 1968* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004).

dressed—how should one come to terms with Joschka Fischer’s youthful violence?⁴

So reformers or barbarians, or perhaps, as so often in history, bad people who produce transformations we approve of—in the case of 1968, unruly agents of overdue change whom, in hindsight, we can pardon for excess—these issues will always provoke different answers. But alongside these questions of interpretation, there still remain explanatory questions involving causality as well as evaluation. Pre-eminent, perhaps, is why the manifestations of 1968 were so widespread. What factors created a worldwide movement? Nineteen sixty-eight saw explosions in Western Europe, communist Eastern Europe, English-speaking North America, Mexico and South America, and parts of Asia and Africa. Were these outbreaks manifestations of one underlying set of discontents, or just separate protests that gathered strength from their simultaneity? Many of my colleagues would say in fact that there was no single radical movement in 1968, that whereas the East European events were heroic and “for real,” the protest movements of Western students were misconceived, childish, and destructive. No matter how they are judged, however, they were massive, widespread, and compelled attention. To my mind, therefore, the most challenging historical issue is whether the historian or social scientist can impute some underlying causes of turbulence to all the contested locations in 1968. If this is the case, if there is a common seismic set of impulses, the issue of significance resolves itself; for surely a common set of underlying causes establishes what most commentators would deem “important.”

Such a criterion for significance admittedly differs from what historians usually look for in ascribing importance. Historians usually judge the meaning of a development in terms of what followed, what came later. The search for significance entails trend-spotting, which is revealed by the course of subsequent developments. To be important or significant is to be pregnant with the future. Now, it is possible to argue that 1968 was pregnant with 1989, just as we might argue that 1848 was pregnant with 1870. In his remarkable account, *A Tale of Two Utopias*, Paul Berman writes that the incubation of 1989, that is

⁴ See Paul Berman, *Power and the Idealists or The Passion of Joschka Fischer and its Aftermath* (Brooklyn, NY: Soft Skull Press, 2005).

“1968’s invisible aftermath... was all the while going on.”⁵ Whereas 1870’s movers and shakers had decided to come to terms with blood and iron, 1989’s revolutionaries had decided to accept liberal democracy and American support. A new liberal and realistic Left emerged, children of 1968, sometimes even participants, but sobered up as they became adults. Václav Havel and Adam Michnik, Berman reminds us, “turned out to be the same heroic persons, now adult liberals.”⁶ (Of course, if a line is to be drawn from 1968 to 1989, one must at least ask whether there is a line from 1968 to 1976–1978 and the terrorist violence of the Red Army Faction, the Red Brigades [admittedly lumping together groups that were more and less murderous], and even some of the Weathermen. They were a tiny minority, but some could trace their emergence from that turbulence.)⁷

Underlying Causality?

But it is also appropriate to seek significance in the magnitude and extent of causation. If all the upheavals of 1968 can be understood as responses to an underlying set of discontents, then something impor-

⁵ Paul Berman, *A Tale of Two Utopias: The Political Journey of the Generation of 1968* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), 13.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁷ See most recently Jeremy Varon, “Refusing to be ‘Good Germans’: New Left Violence as a Global Phenomenon,” in *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute*, no. 43 (Fall 2008), 21–43. For a survey of these groups, see Donatella della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State: A Comparative Analysis of Italy and Germany* (New York, 1995). A vocation of violence could emerge from the struggles of 1968—see the seminars with imprisoned terrorists in Turin by Diego Novelli and Nicola Tranfaglia, *Vite sospesi: le generazioni del terrorismo* (Milan: Garzanti, 1988)—but to suggest that ’68ers were a product of fascism, as does Götz Aly, *Unser Kampf, 1968—ein irritierter Blick zurück* (Frankfurt/Main, 2008), is unwarranted; for a more balanced verdict, see Peter Schneider’s *Rebellion und Wahn: Mein ’68* (Cologne, 2008). For the “everyday” life of the German New Left, including later practitioners of violence, see Ulrich Enzensberger, *Die Jahre der Kommune I: Berlin 1967–1969* (Munich: Goldmann, 2004). Claudio Pavone raised the uncomfortable question about the relation of anti-fascist partisan violence in World War II to Italian terrorist violence in *Una Guerra Civile: Saggio storico sulla moralità della Resistenza* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1991).

tant about underlying conditions will emerge. When earthquakes and volcanic eruptions take place along a geologic fault line—whether in the Adriatic, underneath California’s mountain ridges, or where the Indian Ocean laps at Western Indonesia—we sense that the crust of the earth is inexorably shifting under foot. The question is whether there were, so to speak, seismic shifts underway that generated 1968. To be sure, it might be argued that the manifestations of 1968 erupted just as a bunch of coincidences, but this stretches credulity. Big effects, as Charles Tilly suggested, call for big causes.⁸

Still, even if one remains skeptical about mere coincidence, there is a case to be made for the power of revolutionary contagion, as one group of young radicals were inspired by and learned from another. The sixties brought many precedents for collective action: the massive Tokyo demonstrations against the U.S. Security Pact when Vice President Nixon visited in 1960; the Aldermaston March for nuclear disarmament organized by the British Committee for Nuclear Disarmament (CND); Martin Luther King’s civil rights marches; Berkeley’s Free Speech Movement in 1964; thereafter, the growing protests against the Vietnam War, recruitment by the military or by the Dow Chemical Company; and the Watts ghetto riots of 1967. Doubtless contagion played some role, but if we want to comprehend not just student radicalization but the broader reform efforts in Czechoslovakia and the more muffled manifestations in Poland and elsewhere in Eastern Europe, the diffusion and imitation of a radical repertory will not suffice.

Flash back again briefly to 1848: so-called contagion was undoubtedly important. Revolution began in Palermo in mid-February 1848; within ten days it had engulfed Paris; and in another three weeks, Berlin and Vienna. This in an era before radio or television or cassette players or mobile phones! Students and frustrated opposition leaders took heart from initial successes. But if contagion or diffusion helps account for the common format of protest both in 1848 and 1968, it is not adequate to explain underlying causation in either year. Instead, we can discern a deep-seated discontent with residual authoritarian regimes.

In 1848 a new generation of nineteenth-century professionals and students felt that they were locked into authoritarian structures de-

⁸ Charles Tilly, *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons* (New York: Russell Sage, 1984).

signed at the Congress of Vienna over thirty years earlier. A common agenda of nationalist and liberal aspirations gripped the political classes in the 1840s. Discontent, moreover, found a far wider echo because of the bleak economic conditions of the 1840s. As a European series of events, 1848 is not so hard to explain. The harder question about the 1840s is whether the upheavals in China and East Asia also had some underlying common roots. Did the Taiping uprising in China, with its monumental loss of life, emerge from the same underlying pressures as revolution in Europe? This is not an easy question, and I can not take it up here. But once we widen our perspective in 1848 to include Asian and African events, just as in 1968, we are asking in effect what forces shape global history. And herein lies the real significance of such a broad movement, even if its results seemed insubstantial: it serves to reveal the seismic pressures of an epoch. But what pressures in 1968, what sort of epoch?

As historians, we should be prodded to reflection, because world societies are currently living through a series of international economic developments that may—or may not—testify to a crisis of market capitalism and possibly to serious political instability. The ground has trembled beneath our feet. In our globalized world, moreover, no matter how profound or merely transitory the recent financial difficulties, they are profoundly intertwined. The experience of shared vulnerability today drives home the question: to what degree were global mechanisms at stake forty years ago, in 1968?

Of course there was a revolutionary repertory that was widely copied, which involved radical demands, formal petitions—the *pliego peritorio* in Mexico City or the Eight Demands at Harvard—and clashes with police or soldiers: the 1967 demonstrations against the Shah's visit in Berlin produced an early student martyr, Benno Ohnesorg. The battle of the Valle Giulia followed in Rome; clashes took place in Addis Ababa, Cairo, Calcutta; huge demonstrations took place to protest police action against students at the Zocalo in Mexico City in July and August, followed by the brutal assault in the Tlateloco district of the capital on October 2, which left perhaps 300 students dead.⁹ Columbia's turmoil in 1968, which bitterly divided faculty,

⁹ Arif Dirlik, "The Third World," in Fink, Gassert, and Junker, eds., 1968, 295–317. For Mexico, among many others, Sergio Zermeno, *Mexico: una de-*

was followed a year later at Harvard, where students were summoned to “strike because they’re squeezing the life out of you,” sit-ins, barricades, smashed windows; that is, conduct designed—at least on the part of the Maoists—to provoke police action that would polarize the university. The search for violent confrontation in 1968 represented an important difference from 1989, when mass demonstrations aspired to achieving concessions without violence. In 1968 it was assumed that violence in the university would ignite revolution in society at large.¹⁰

In asking about the implications of geographical spread, I have also been provoked by the “Forum” in the October 2008 *American Historical Review*, which commemorates the controversy half a century earlier concerning “the general crisis of the seventeenth century.” In his retrospective comment, Jonathan Dewald urged downplaying the idea of crisis, and the notion of an underlying causal frame for seventeenth-century upheavals. Historians, he argues, “have become skeptical about linkages among politics, culture, social relations, and economic practices.” There has taken place what he terms a “retreat from structuralism.” With respect to the Malthusian mechanisms alleged as underlying widespread unrest, “a vision of general crisis has to be replaced with multiple crises, governed by highly specific logics.”¹¹ Dewald is a good historian of the *ancien régime*. And any competent historian can always demonstrate that each sequence of events is unique. Many of us chose the discipline because temperamentally we treasure what is different, and not what reveals general trends. As historians we revel in particularity: it is easy enough to show, whether for 1648 or 1848 or 1968, that every society faced its own particular difficulties and challenges. In this view the protests were united only by

mocracia utópica; el movimiento estudiantil del 68, sixth ed. (Mexico DF: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1987).

¹⁰ Recent syntheses in Norbert Frei, 1968: *Jugendrevolte und Globaler Proteste* (Munich: Deutsche Taschenbuch Verlag, 2008); Jeremi Suri, ed., *The Global Revolutions of 1968* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007), the first issue of 900 (*Novecento*): 1968–69: *dagli eventi alla storia*, vol. 1, no. 1 (July–December 1999). See also Roberto Lumley, “Spazio dei movimenti e ‘crisi d’autorità,’” 99–107; and Sydney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

¹¹ Jonathan Dewald, “Crisis, Chronology, and the Shape of European Social History,” *American Historical Review* 113, no. 4 (Oct. 2008), 1044, 1046.

a sort of competitive dramaturgy, and even in that respect they varied between Prague and the West.

Of course, this is true. But, at the risk of provocation, particularity is a trivial finding. It stares us in the face all the time. This does not mean that historians do not win insights from patiently setting out how developments were particular and how they differed from each other—e.g., the United States started its sixties earlier; and as Marie Claire Granjon wrote, Europe would live its sixties in the 1970s¹²—but just to announce their uniqueness does not take us very far. Abandoning the historian's traditional call for differentiation, I want to revert to the search for a common logic, a common challenge, for the societies that experienced the upheavals of 1968—even when the societies were on opposite sides of the great communist-capitalist divide. It was tempting for many critics, such as Raymond Aron, to argue that although the Czech experiment was deeply serious and ultimately tragic, the agitation in the West was just an unworthy “acting out” or psychodrama, with potentially destructive consequences.¹³

To resist this judgment and argue that there must have been some underlying so-called structural causes, East and West, cannot confirm that they really existed. Many good historians, in line with Dewald, contest the notion of some underlying causal structure as the misapplication of a spatial metaphor and an illusory if persistent legacy of Marxism or positivism. Nonetheless, 1968, I believe, was more than just a traveling theater of protest. Some common factors produced the global outburst. On a related note, I do argue for the significance of 1968, not significance in terms of aftermath, but significance as a measure of the stresses of postwar society that I believe powerfully contributed to the eruptions. No one can determine whether 1968 brought changes that would not have come about given the momentum of the long preceding decade. My metaphor is that of the earthquake: what we learn from a tremor high on the Richter scale is not when future earthquakes will occur, but what gigantic seismic stresses had accumulated before the slippages of Earth's tectonic plates against each

¹² Marie Christine Granjon, *L'Amérique de la contestation. Les années 60 aux États-Unis* (Paris: FNSP, 1985).

¹³ Raymond Aron, *La Révolution introuvable: Réflexions sur la révolution de mai* (Paris: Fayard, 1968).

other. Of course 1968 would have consequences—although different from what its activists hoped for. But I believe that what 1968 teaches most validly is the nature of global development in the twenty preceding years.

Importance for the Future? Signification of the Past?

In this conviction, my enterprise differs from those who have sought to see 1968 as pregnant with the future. Paul Berman's book *A Tale of Two Utopias* is based on this premise. I cannot provide the same intimate knowledge of the American Left; neither can I draw on detailed knowledge of Eastern Europe, that memoirs and new scholarship allows.¹⁴ Nonetheless I attempt something different. From Berman's perspective, world history was being made by students, and "there was, as everyone recognized at the time, a common theme. It was the split between the young and the old."¹⁵ He follows in particular the American student Left, the battles of Students for a Democratic Society with the arcane remnants of the anti-communist socialist Left in New York, those survivors of the battles against Stalinism in the 1930s he describes variously as "grizzled" or "gnarled." Berman's history, one might say, is a phenomenological account of the generation that went from '68 to '89, an account based on perceived and lived experience. It is a history from within. This description is not meant to be patronizing; for Berman's chapter on Eastern Europe, "Zappa and Havel," is perhaps more brilliant than his recollections of Old and New Left in the United States. And it provides a story of how the Czechs got from the Prague Spring, via Václav Havel, smoky little theaters, imports of

¹⁴ For the latest resume of the Czech crisis, its causes and ramifications in the Eastern Bloc, see Stefan Karner, et al., *Prager Frühling: Das internationale Krisenjahr 1968*, vol. 1, Beiträge (Graz: Böhlau)—1,300 pages of scholarly monographic contributions, to be followed by a volume of documentation.

¹⁵ Berman, *A Tale of Two Utopias*, 24. Just to situate my own personal trajectory, I was not part of the '68 movement. I was already married with two new children and did not have the temperament, although I had a few students who were involved, and many who sympathized. What I did have was the historical training to satisfy their immense historical thirst for what became known as a "usable past"—in this case, to take an example, the experience of George Orwell and the POUM and Barcelona in 1936–1937.

rock music, and the Plastic People of the Universe, to Charter 77 and the fall of 1989.

Berman's sort of life-cycle history provides a redemptive tale for participants. Those who held youthful and naïve Marxist convictions become ready to exercise mature leadership along democratic lines. They reaffirm liberalism and anti-communism and recognize the clumsy virtues of America. By doing so, they overcome and atone for earlier silliness and even violence in 1968. "Ripeness is all." Interestingly enough, in Berman's account, as in Tim Ryback's history *Rock around the Bloc* and recently in Padraic Kenney's *A Carnival of Revolution*, music's Dionysian role plays a crucial role in 1989 and provides a major linkage from '68 to '89.¹⁶ Their common script might be called "The Birth of Liberty out of the Spirit of Music," to update another philosopher of the Dionysian. Once again the Dionysian arrives to confer a state of grace on the local bacchantes. It tends to suggest again that 1968 was not all bad, that it contained a search for fulfillment that had to undermine conformism, whether of the establishment or the Old Left in the West, the *nomenklatura* in the East. Nevertheless, a rock music history of the transit from '68 to '89 can be only a very partial story. No matter how groovy and fun it is, as Nietzsche himself told us, the Apollonian formative impulse also had to play a constitutive role in creating drama. With maturity comes a scathing critique of the radical movements that memoirists such as Berman participated in: their group conformity, their repressiveness, their sexism. And yet retrospective wisdom, in the life-cycle approach, must still acknowledge the generosity of youth.

I do not mean to diminish Berman's history from within. Still, with life-cycle, history is memoir writ large, and it tends to surrender social theory to biography, analysis to evocation. The perceived integrity of the personality through time seems to authenticate, indeed provide, the model of social change and upheaval. The presumed decency of the retrospective narrator justifies to a degree the inevitable errors of youth. Becoming is all. Paul Berman has wrestled with this issue even

¹⁶ Timothy W. Ryback, *Rock around the Bloc: A History of Rock Music in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Padraic Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution: Central Europe 1989* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

more poignantly in his reflections on the career and passions of Joschka Fischer, *Power and the Idealists*.¹⁷ Youth versus age may explain Paris, Berlin, Columbia, and Harvard. Still, we must ask, what was it about the world of the 1950s and early 1960s that produced such a reaction that seemed so hostile to youth? What seemed so threatening to a generation of young people? It could not be simple repression—for the repression often followed and did not precede the provocations and indeed was sometimes fervently sought by the demonstrations. Perhaps it was the fact that they were being prepared for a world without surprise and also without prospects. The vision they thought they were being offered was that of a gray on gray (not Michnik's "beautiful gray," but the gray of the "gray flannel suit"): good jobs, tolerance, social protection, and so forth. In part it sprang from the postwar—all the privation of the war but without the danger or the chance for heroism: the Weberian iron cage of instrumental rationality, of renunciation in the present for a better future, a call to social discipline for the sake of the Cold War and postwar reconstruction. To the mass of young people, this probably was a vast improvement and an eminently sensible bargain. But to a significant number it lacked transcendence, excitement, or mission. Whether under the auspices of multi-party alternation, de facto single-party rule (as in Japan and Mexico) or a one-party version, both social systems seemed to offer a dispiriting fusion of predictability and insecurity—predictability, in that a bureaucratized society would provide *les héritiers* with a safe role as part of Alan Touraine's new class; insecurity, in that it offered no guarantee they could enjoy more than this *fonctionnaire* future.

Post-Stalinist communism and the welfarist democracy of the West seemed to offer some of the same prospects—certainly to those who did not have to live under "real existing socialism." And this conclusion, while myopic, found serious people who argued for it—even, in a way, Aron and Bell, who saw "industrial society" as an overarching epochal structure. Post-Stalinist communism flirted with the vision of a cybernetic future, of technocracy, as did the Western multiversity. "We [are not permitted to]... ask questions," Rudi Dutschke wrote, "but [must] accept the structure as it is, and thus as students and scientists we become more or less useful idiots within the system of maximiza-

¹⁷ Berman, *Power and the Idealists*, or *The Passion of Joschka Fischer*.

tion of profits...”¹⁸ “The university became of interest because technical and economic intelligence in advanced capitalism is more and more important for the reproduction of capital. Thus the whole problem of technocrats within automatised [sic] industry!” (p. 123) So-called university reforms were just devices designed to shorten the length of studies. But

the authoritarian society can no longer bring about reforms within itself, in the radical meaning of real change. Reforms are only the refuge of the rulers who are concerned with stabilising their positions... The revolution is not an event that takes two or three days, in which there is shooting and hanging. It is a long drawn out process in which new people are created, capable of renovating society so that their revolution does not replace one elite with another, but... creates a new anti-authoritarian structure with anti-authoritarian people...” (p. 129).

Still, universities in Dutschke’s critique offered the possibility of reflection.

On the one hand we can educate ourselves, on the other hand we always run the risk of educating ourselves for interests which are not our own, the interest of the rulers. We know the history of the American universities where this has become very clear and is now the pattern for science, which has become an instrument of American imperialism’s direct machinery of destruction.” (p. 120)

Of course, it was not just reflection that students wanted, it was mobilization and direct action. “The most beautiful day of my political life was the first of March 1968,” confessed Roberto Massari, referring to the “Battle of the Valle Giulia” in Rome that climaxed months of mobilization throughout Italian universities in pursuit of *Potere Studentesco*, and the call for a “negative university” that originated with

¹⁸ Rudi Dutschke, “The Students and the Revolution (7 March 1968),” in Jeremi Suri, ed., *The Global Revolutions of 1968* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 118–141. Quotations cited by page in the text.

the sociology students of Trento.¹⁹ Common to all these movements was a struggle for public space that was bound to become violent—that was the point of it. The student movement was the first in postwar history that “discovered the public space of streets and squares as a site of politics, developing there its own repertory of action, independently of the system of institutionalized politics.”²⁰ The historian Pierre Vidal Naquet, who kept his psychic distance and admitted he could never shout “CRS=SS” because he remembered the SS, conceded that “everything in this affair was symbolic, including the barricades.” But that does not mean it was insignificant. In the *grandes journées*, theater is life and has consequences.²¹ Bakunin and Rosa Luxemburg would have approved; perhaps not the Rosa whom the East Germans of 1988 cited when she called for freedom for those who think differently, but the Rosa of the mass strike.

The classical once-revolutionary protagonist, organized labor, of course, played an ambiguous role. Insofar as European unions remained under the control of the communist party, they participated in the movement, won their hefty wage increases in the Grenelle agreements or from Italian entrepreneurs, but then backed away. In Italy, a strong current of *autonomisti* continued to make Italian industrial life an ongoing contest for factory power. Milan metal workers revived the earlier dreams of factory councils emanating from the base, structures that had emerged briefly in each postwar period.²² Each society’s radicals found a local enemy: in Germany it was fascism, which through the specter of integration of Nazis still supposedly exerted a presence. Again, to cite Dutschke: “fascism is no longer structured and organized in one party or one person. The new fascism reveals itself through the organized authoritarian institutions in all parts of the advanced capitalist society. I am now primarily talking about the advanced capitalist society of West Germany.” (p. 121) In the United States, racism and the war served as the functional equivalent of latent fascism.

¹⁹ Jan Kurz, “Verso la contestazione globale: La primavera calda del movimento studentesco italiano,” in *900 (Novecento)* 1968–69, 56.

²⁰ Kurz, in *900 (Novecento)*, 69.

²¹ Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Mémoires*, vol. 2 (Paris: Seuil, 1995), 295, 297.

²² Claudia Finetti, “Autonomia operaia: L’Alfa Romeo di Arese (1970–1973),” in *900 (Novecento)*, 71–98.

Politics as Poignancy

In conclusion, we can now contextualize the transnational or global meaning of 1968. The marches and demonstrations, the lurid and exaggerated diagnoses of imperialism and fascism, the thirst in some quarters for the paternalist mask of soft power to drop and reveal its repressive reality—these manifestations were not global just because they flared up in so many different sites across the world. They were global in that they arose as the first systemic challenge to the Yalta regime erected after defeating Nazism, fascism, and Japanese military expansion. Ironically enough, the stability of both West and East had depended upon their reciprocal rivalry. The Cold War buckled both systems together in an agonistic relationship that claimed and justified immense collective psychopolitical energy in facing the enemy. Communism and democracy had defeated fascism—now they confronted each other, but imposed (in the East) or stabilized (in the West) domestic regimes that made their reciprocal adversarial stance into respective ideological pillars. Ultimately, '68, I believe, testified to the fact that for a generation, from the late 1930s with the approach of war, then the privations of war, then the intense confrontations of the Cold War, meant a shared epoch of public mobilization. Albert Hirschman's brilliant essay, *Shifting Involvements*,²³ argues that such commitments will disappoint in turn: public rewards will grow stale, as will private rewards. By the 1960s it was time for the young publics in both camps to press for an agenda of expressiveness and self-realization rather than an agenda of discipline. Such profound shifts cannot occur without excesses, both silly and cruel. Sixty-eight—whether in Latin America, the American and western universities, or in the repressed challenges to communism represented that global reaction to the public agendas of 1933–1963.

The groups in control of each system were still too strong to be displaced by the protestors who sought to undermine this reciprocal dependence. That would happen to a degree in the West in the 1970s—at least the challenge of unions and women's groups—and in the East

²³ Albert O. Hirschman, *Shifting Involvements: Private Interests and Public Action* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

at the end of the 1980s, but it was only foreshadowed in the 1960s. Meanwhile the agents of history that beckoned were the revolutionary peasantry, those summoned by Mao's Cultural Revolution, with its egalitarian renewal, or those who had followed Che to the Andes, or were defeating the Americans in the Mekong Delta and even, so the Tet Offensive suggested, in the once-immune zones of Saigon.

Critics of the Left have often insisted that Tet was actually an FLN defeat and an American victory that was misinterpreted by the media. But I think this argument misses the point. Body count was a misleading index in the Vietnam War. The stakes involved were not the number of casualties or even the permanent occupation of Vietnam's cities, but the visible demonstration of American impotence to do what it claimed it could do and had done. Tet demonstrated that American power had not crushed the capacity of the NFL in Vietnam; it showed an alternative sort of struggle, as had Cuba and Algeria in the years before. The proximity in time of the Tet Offensive and the Prague Spring helps set the significance of 1968 in global context and lets us finally understand why 1968 belongs to global history. Tet, in the eyes of those angered by the Vietnam War, supposedly struck at Western imperialism; the events of the Prague Spring sought to dismantle bureaucratized post-Stalinism. Both sets of events thus undermined the frozen Cold War equilibrium of forces that had been supposedly sealed by the Yalta agreements a generation earlier. Tet—like the Cuban Revolution earlier—was interpreted by the Western Left not as mainly a Marxist or even Leninist event, but as a challenge by the revolutionary ex-colonial world against the North. A South–North conflict, as well as a mutiny within the industrialized “socialist” world, revealed that what seemed at stake was the unavowed domination of a Soviet–American condominium.

Think back to the Yalta agreements of February 1945. To East Europeans “Yalta” came to be seen as the founding act of a Soviet–American condominium for dominating East and West Europeans respectively. The visible signs of the Yalta system were the Western refusals to come to the aid of communist rebels whom their statesmen had rashly encouraged to revolt, as in Berlin in 1953 and Hungary in 1956. But the East Europeans' reading of Yalta, I believe, was a false one. It saw Yalta as a renewed version of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, a collusive partition of Poland and of East Central Europe as a

whole. In fact, Yalta provided no easy condominium, no shared hegemony. It just introduced an era of massive confrontation that strained every national and ideological reflex on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Whatever the implications for East Central Europe, Yalta was not *just* a Soviet–American set of agreements to minimize East–West disagreement in the postwar era. For Franklin Roosevelt, Yalta was a compromise that would make possible the functioning of the United Nations organization. A postwar world in which fascism or militarism would not recur and democracy might ultimately prevail would require such expedients. The meaning of Yalta was also different for East Asian development. The agreements incorporated important clauses concerning Asia by which Stalin recognized Chiang Kai-shek’s government in return for winning territorial concessions in China. In the eyes of the Communist Chinese regime, Yalta thus followed in the steps of earlier “unequal treaties” and thus perpetuated what might be described as a North–South inequality.

Nineteen sixty-eight thus represented a moment in which a new generation was effectively transforming an international politics dominated by East–West conflict and the respective elites that had supposedly instrumentalized it for their varying domestic purposes into a North–South struggle. Logically enough, China—certainly no friend of the Czech reform course—found itself condemning Brezhnev’s intervention in 1968 and rediscovered its own vulnerability vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. This would lead, over the years to come, both to a curbing of the Cultural Revolution and to acceptance of Nixon and Kissinger’s courtship, and ultimately therefore to China’s own loss of radical charisma among once radical enthusiasts.²⁴ By the early 1970s the New Left would have to find its Third World champions no longer in East Asia, but among Palestinians, black South Africans, the Marxist liberation movements in the failing Portuguese colonies, and the guerrilla movements of South America.

Sixty-eight, moreover, represented a rather inchoate challenge to the structures of industrial societies in both the communist and capitalist worlds. It was a reaction to the disciplining of labor that Fordist mass society had allegedly imposed. Those students who demonstrat-

²⁴ See Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, “China under Siege: Escaping the Dangers of 1968,” in Fink, Gassert, and Junker, eds., 1968, 193–216.

ed were hardly likely to have to go off to the assembly lines after they graduated. But they felt caught up in the mass processes of a complex and bureaucratized anti-heroic society. The fact that their elders described late industrial society, East and West, as the culmination of Weberian rationality, and a way out of the dangerous systemic confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union, did not reassure them. Sixty-eighters believed they were combating the “disenchantment of the world,” not on behalf of a neo-fascistic appeal to the dark charms of blood and soil, but in search of a post-industrial liberation. An idealized vision of peasant or continuing anti-colonial revolution emerged alongside the more familiar repertoires of the urban left. The ongoing war in Vietnam and the appearance of African-American quasi-militias such as the Black Panthers confirmed such a reading of current history for some of those who took up militant action, those we might call the “hard” ’68ers.

Such an analysis necessarily oversimplifies both ideas and contexts. In terms of ideas there were “soft” as well as “hard” ’68ers. The forty-year-old Jürgen Habermas attracted adherents not by any doctrines related to Third World rebellion, but by a concept of “substantive” rationality as an alternative to the means-end Weberian calculus he believed insufficient. The compartmentalization of life that granted immunity to market logic had to yield to a vision of societal totality. For the soft ’68ers, Marx’s neo-Hegelian *1844 Manuscripts*, not the Little Red Book, served as a foundational text. Alienation more than domination described the capitalist condition. Similarly, Herbert Marcuse suggested that individual fulfillment, emotional as well as rational, was possible only beyond liberal capitalist repressive tolerance. Evocations of escape and transcendence rather than violent direct action emerged from these tracts.

Generalizations about “context” also need tempering. The upheavals of ’68 did not take place only in Fordist and industrial societies. They shook societies characterized less by mature industrial sectors than the simultaneous existence of large rural sectors and bloated public bureaucracies, such as characterized post-Bourbon countries in Latin America, where a massive university system trained the civil servants and administrators of once-Bourbon states. Existential recoil could take place against the imagined ennui of the office future as well as the assembly line. Kafka threatened in societies not yet industrialized.

It is plausible to characterize any huge upheaval as “pregnant with the future,” especially when it convulses an age cohort poised at the edge of adulthood. It is no accident that ’68 would send echoes down the years. But 1968 closed an epoch as surely as it opened one. Its importance, I believe, lay less in the ideas it created than its undermining of the competitive equilibria of the first Cold War. Marx thought 1848 and its French aftermath was farce, not tragedy. But that famous formulation, taken from Hegel, was also misleading. The events of 1848, to return to the analogy cited at the beginning of this paper, had not really represented farce but what Carl Schmitt later termed “political romanticism,” the ego’s illusion that historical structures might easily yield to ideological fantasy, consequently an over-valuation of gesture and image. What more durably shaped the long-term historical outcomes of the mid-nineteenth century than the revolutions of 1848 were transformations from above that came a decade or two later, whether in Meiji Japan, Cavour’s Italy, Bismarck’s Germany, Juarez’s and later Porfirio Diaz’s Mexico, post-Civil War America, Alexandrine Russia—in short: the “positivist” era of liberal-conservative compromise based on railroads and nation building, and capitalist industrialization. Nineteen sixty-eight likewise was a romantic outburst that could shake and undermine the Cold War order, but ultimately it required a new phase of technological change, of wealth, and neo-capitalism to make its more generous impulses feasible.

As that transformation took hold, some of those who had been ’68ers rejected their earlier enthusiasms as unrealistic and even infantile. Some moved from the radical left to a more or less thoughtful anti-Marxism or neo-liberalism. But many of those who had been ’68ers felt that they had participated in something heroic or at least forgivable—not just the acting-out that saddened Raymond Aron, but an episode that prepared societies for the activists of the later 1970s and the 1980s, who eschewed violence but negotiated the emergence of Iberian and Latin American democracy and brought down the communist regimes of Eastern Europe. I would suggest that for these former ’68ers, signification of the earlier period was constructed subjectively through what might be termed the politics of poignancy—the commemoration of irrevocably vanishing youth and brief reveries of a future unclouded by disenchantment. It is easy to condemn this global upheaval for its Peter Pan quality. But the politics of poignancy would not have be-

come so universal had the immense and institutionalized structures of the Cold War (which require their own separate analysis) not been so gripping; and had the socio-economic discipline of postwar reconstruction and development not reinforced any anti-utopian realism so intensely throughout the postwar decades.

At bottom, perhaps, the political valence of “adulthood” or “maturity”—what the Germans call *Mündigkeit*—had undergone a silent transformation in the two postwar decades, not perhaps for the vast majority of families and individuals who always had to survive in a world of economic constraint, but for the increasing number of youth being introduced to higher levels of formal education. Adulthood had previously meant access to political choice, family formation, and the responsibility, or even the obligation, of dangerous service to faith and country. But in the twenty years after 1945, it had become interpreted as a foreclosure of experimentation and a summons to routine and decades of structured conformity. Those who had accepted this stoic mission accepted its repressive quality as the price of adulthood.²⁵ Kant’s “dare to know” seemed to have become “know not to dare,” punctuated certainly by periodic political challengers, whether Pierre Mendès-France, Willy Brandt, John F. Kennedy, Che Guevara, or others—all of whom, however, seemed not to impose a successful new instauration but rather to challenge a formidable persistent one. For those who want to study 1968 more deeply, then, it will be necessary to understand the grip and the ideological hegemony of the fifties. *Sous les pavés, le passé.*

²⁵ It was revealing that Philip Rieff constructed his remarkable analysis of Sigmund Freud as a clear-sighted exponent of such stoicism at the end of the 1950s: *Freud: The Mind of the Moralizer* (New York: Viking, 1959).

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The revolutions of 1968 have become history without ever having been understood in all of their variation. Vladimir Tismaneanu has assembled the perfect group to recount the events and the consequences, the promises and the disappointments, and all of the Europes real and imagined.

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The volume blazes fresh trails through exploring the intellectual developments that contributed to 1968 and how the landscape of ideas was transformed by the events of that year. The innovative use of biographical information, especially of intellectuals, is one of the great strengths of this volume which breaks new ground in terms of empirical analysis as well as the evaluation of long-term intellectual developments. This is a weighty and sophisticated contribution to understanding the battle of ideas and the flow of events that shaped the ideological evolution of Europe in the 1960s and beyond.

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Central European University Press
Budapest–New York

Sales and information: **ceupress@ceu.hu**

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